

BV  
210  
592

# Our Life of Prayer

BY  
*Joseph*  
*The Rev. J. Wilson Sutton, D.D. 1881 -*  
Vicar of Trinity Chapel  
New York City



MOREHOUSE-GORHAM CO.

NEW YORK

:

MILWAUKEE

1938

COPYRIGHT BY  
MOREHOUSE-GORHAM CO.

1938

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

*To Those Who Pray*

## PREFACE

**P**RAYER is an art. As an art it has its principles and its methods. These principles and methods I have striven to set forth in this book. If what I have written should prove of help to anyone in the cultivation of his life of prayer, in drawing him nearer to his God and Father, in deepening his spiritual life, and in making him more effective in witnessing to the truth, I shall be more than grateful.



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>I The Nature of Prayer</i> .....	11
<i>II The Purpose of Prayer</i> .....	19
<i>III The Spirit of Prayer</i> .....	29
<i>IV Method in Prayer</i> .....	40
<i>V Preparation for Prayer</i> .....	49
<i>VI Confession</i> .....	56
<i>VII Petition</i> .....	64
<i>VIII Intercession</i> .....	71
<i>IX Thanksgiving</i> .....	83
<i>X Worship</i> .....	90
<i>XI Meditation</i> .....	98
<i>XII Private Prayer and Public Prayer</i> .....	109
<i>XIII Some Fundamental Principles</i> .....	116
<i>XIV Practical Suggestions</i> .....	123
<i>XV The Lord's Prayer</i> .....	132
<i>Thoughts on Prayer</i> .....	139

# I

## THE NATURE OF PRAYER

THE WORLD has many needs, but its greatest need is prayer, and the grace of God which comes through prayer. Yet for many people prayer is a very dull thing. They say their prayers because they feel it is their duty to do so and because they believe that in some way prayer is a means of calling down grace from heaven and of strengthening them for their daily tasks, but their prayers are at best exceedingly meager, and they find little joy in them.

The dullness is due to the fact that they know so little of the meaning of prayer, and are so untrained in the art of praying. We find joy in the things we do well. Skill along any line brings with it a sense of freedom and carries us over hard places. He who is skilled in prayer finds it not always easy but always strengthening, and always in the end bringing joy. It may be a real struggle to pray, and has often been for the greatest of God's saints, but the struggle brings its own joy and its own peace. Our spirits are ever crying out for air. The world about us is stuffy and often suffocating. The gateway to freedom and fuller life

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

is prayer, the breathing into our spirits of the clear invigorating air of God's life.

Prayer is an essential element in the spiritual life. It is so essential that without it there is no religion in the deeper sense of that term. Frequently it is very elemental. People often pray without being clearly conscious that they are praying; but unless there is prayer in some degree there is and can be no religion. Since this is true, it is of the utmost importance, if we are to become more conscious of our relationship to God, and if we are to grow in grace, in knowledge, and in power, that our understanding of prayer should become increasingly clear and our practice of prayer increasingly faithful and intelligent. We need to know just what the nature of prayer is.

Prayer is one of those elements in life which it is difficult to define, which indeed cannot be defined quite adequately. Someone has said that nothing can be defined which is worth defining. There is manifest truth in this statement and it is true of prayer in a rather special sense. It will be better therefore not to attempt to define prayer but rather to give certain descriptions of it, and to deal briefly with certain aspects of it, in the hope that its nature and significance may be the more readily understood.

1. *Prayer may be said to be the breathing of the spirit.* We know what the breathing of the body is and how necessary it is to physical life. It is so necessary that among ancient peoples it was identified with life. They knew, as we know, that when breathing ceases

## THE NATURE OF PRAYER

life comes to an end. As it is with the body so it is with the spirit. Only he who prays lives spiritually. To cease to pray is spiritual death. To have a rich and full spiritual life we must not only pray; we must pray intelligently, faithfully, lovingly.

Those who have studied singing or public speaking will remember that one of the first things their teachers sought to find out was how they breathed. Many of them have been astonished to find that while they have been breathing all their lives they have not really known how to breathe correctly, and insofar as their breathing has been incorrect their lives have been incomplete. Probably the greater part of the human race uses but a small portion of its breathing power. Breathing bad air, if it is continued, will sooner or later prove disastrous. Breathing insufficient good air will in time prove, if not disastrous, at any rate very disabling.

It may be safely said that only a very few Christians come anywhere near developing to the fullest extent their capacity for spiritual life, and these do so because they have learned and practiced the art of prayer, because their spiritual breathing has been correct and adequate. The great majority of us, longing intensely as we often do for more complete living, fail to attain it because we use so little of our prayer power.

Breathing is a twofold process. We breathe out and we breathe in; we breathe out bad air and we breathe in good air. Prayer is likewise a twofold process. It is the putting away of the evil which is in us; it is the taking in of the love, the power, and the life of God.



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

2. *Prayer is the realizing of the spiritual atmosphere by which we are surrounded.* We are surrounded by various atmospheres. To a very large extent the character of our lives is determined by these atmospheres and by the extent to which we realize them and consciously enter into them.

The importance of the physical atmosphere in which we live or, as we more commonly put it, of our material environment, is widely recognized today, and much time and thought are being expended on efforts to make this atmosphere what it should be for people of every type. This is ground for devout thanksgiving.

The importance of the intellectual atmosphere which surrounds us is also widely recognized today. It does not require much thought to bring us to a realization that millions of lives are poverty-stricken and dwarfed either because of a lack of intellectual training or because so many of those whose minds have been trained are satisfied with superficial and sometimes grossly sordid literature. To a much greater extent than is generally realized the books and papers which people read influence the color of their thinking, the nature of their point of view, and the trend of their moral character.

Unhappily the importance of the spiritual atmosphere in which we live is not widely recognized. It is our way—one is tempted to say our modern way, but as a matter of fact in this as in so many other respects we are only living in the past—to put the body first, the mind second, and the spirit third, whereas the

order should be just the reverse. If our Lord's teaching be true, man's spirit is the highest part of him, that part with which he comes most directly into contact with God, that part which should be the leader and director of all the other parts of his being and upon the training and developing of which he should bestow the greatest care.

One of the most inspiring truths of our religion is that God is omnipresent—that is, that He is everywhere—which is only another way of saying that we are all at all times surrounded by the spiritual atmosphere which God creates or, perhaps we might say, which God is. This being true, our problem is to learn to appreciate increasingly this great fundamental fact—to live more and more consciously in contact with this spiritual atmosphere, to develop our spiritual capacity, to close our eyes frequently to the physical and even the intellectual atmosphere which surrounds us, and more and more truly to live and move and have our being in God. It is prayer which enables us to do this, prayer which is not only the knowing but the realizing that we are ever in the presence of God and His angels, that heaven lies about us not only in our infancy but always, and that our spirits may ever breathe the pure atmosphere of the life which is life indeed.

3. *Prayer is more familiarly regarded as communion with God.* So indeed it is, and as such we shall consider it as we proceed. One need only pause here to say what a thrilling thing prayer is when viewed from this standpoint. Truly to appreciate that we, feeble and sinful

---

meaning. The most complete fellowship is that in which talking and listening go on side by side in due proportion. If God is what we believe Him to be, if He loves us as we believe He does, He must have much to say to us—much by way of correction, guidance, encouragement, and loving commendation—and not to listen attentively to Him is a tragedy of the first order.

From another standpoint we may view prayer in its relationship to God, to others, and to ourselves. In its relationship to God, prayer is the loving converse of a Father with His children. It is the means whereby the children come to the Father for guidance, and also the means whereby the Father guides them. It is the means whereby the children, through imbibing the Father's spirit and living in the atmosphere of His life, help Him in the carrying out of His purposes for them and for the world. God is interested in our prayers,

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

as we are, are privileged to enter when we will into intimate and conscious converse with the Creator of heaven and earth—that Creator who holds all things in the hollow of His hand, who is perfect righteousness, perfect holiness, perfect love, and perfect peace, who is light and life—is to have an overwhelming experience, and one which should first send us to our knees in penitence and then lift us to our feet in glad thanksgiving and praise.

Communion with God involves speaking to God and listening to God.

1. *Speaking to God.* In prayer considered from this standpoint there are five elements. They will merely be listed here, and will be considered more in detail in succeeding chapters. They are:

(a) *Worship*, which may be described as expressing to God our sense of His power, His beauty, His love. Worship is telling God and showing Him how much we think of Him and love Him.

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

or, perhaps it would be better to say, in our prayer life. He is interested because of all that our prayer life means to us and also because of all that it means to Him, for since He is our Father, nothing which interests us can be without interest for Him.

In its relationship to others prayer is working with God on their behalf. It is reaching out to help them, to surround them with love and spiritual power, to lift them to a higher spiritual plane, to lead them, so far as they will let it do so, into the very presence of God Himself.

In its relationship to ourselves prayer is the realization and the deepening of our divine sonship. We are sons of God, as the Scriptures make abundantly clear. Our sonship is not divine in the sense in which our Lord's sonship is divine, but in the sense that it comes from God and rests in Him. St. Peter dared to say that we are partakers of the divine nature. Prayer is the means of realizing and making vital this participation.



## II

### THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

IF IT is important to understand the nature of prayer it is equally important to understand its purpose. Without a clear understanding of the aim with which we approach God, we cannot hope for any adequate result. Purposeless undertakings can never be successful in the fullest sense. Few things are more needed today than an adequate understanding of the purpose of life and of the purpose of prayer, without which life can be but a weak and limited thing. Prayer has many purposes, but one is paramount and this grows naturally out of our relationship to God.

1. *The purpose of prayer is to do honor to God, to advance God's glory.* This is the primary purpose both of life and of prayer, and it needs to be emphasized, for there are thousands of people who pray, some of them very earnestly and faithfully, without realizing that this great aim should lie behind all their prayers. There are indeed some who deny that the advancement of the glory of God is the primary aim of prayer and would hold that only a selfish, self-centered God would be interested in the advancement of His



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

glory. Such an attitude reveals a distressing misunderstanding of the nature of religion as our Lord made it known in His life here on earth.

When God asks His children to do Him honor, to seek primarily the advancement of His glory, it is not because He is selfish or self-centered, but because it is for their highest good. His desire is to lift them out of their selfishness and self-centeredness and give them an aim which carries them far beyond the realm of this life and puts them at once into touch with the eternal world. The human spirit, though it is human, is also in some sense divine, and can find complete satisfaction in God, and in God alone. Of course if the human spirit is to find satisfaction in God, God must be a Being to whom it can give itself absolutely, without any kind of reservation; the kind of God whom it delights to honor; whose glory it delights to advance and spread throughout the world. Such is the Christian God, the God revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To assert that to advance God's glory is the primary purpose of prayer is to lift prayer above the selfish, sometimes almost sordid, basis upon which it rests, and to link it with the ultimate goal of the whole of life. This will not in itself answer all the difficulties which arise with regard to prayer, but it will reduce those difficulties to their proper proportions, and will show them to be so unimportant that they will often be either forgotten or ignored; for most difficulties about prayer spring out of an altogether too limited view of its nature and function and are based upon

## THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

self-conscious and self-centered ideas of it. He who approaches God in prayer from the standpoint of what prayer can do for God rather than from the standpoint of what it can do for himself must have a certain largeness of mind to begin with, and he will find that such an approach will develop not only his mind but his whole being.

If God be, as we believe Him to be, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present, all-loving, the Redeemer and Sanctifier of men, all-holy, then there can be no higher occupation, no deeper and more satisfying experience, than paying homage to Him and seeking to make His character known to all the world. This is the purpose of prayer as it has been revealed to those who have caught glimpses of the life beyond. This is the purpose of prayer as it is made known in such a book as *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, where the ceaseless worship of God is pictured, where saints fall down before His throne in adoration.

We may say, then, that the primary purpose of prayer is to do honor to God, to advance His glory.

If this be recognized we may go on to consider other purposes of prayer, secondary and yet important, which grow out of the one great purpose and are governed by it.

2. *It is the purpose of prayer to help God accomplish His will for the universe.* One of the most profound truths of religion and of life is the truth that God has given man a share in the carrying out of His will.

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

In spite of man's many and great failures in all the ages, God has trusted, and still trusts, him to coöperate with Him in His fundamental plan. Men do not pray, or should not, in order to obtain God's help in the fulfilment of their will, but in order to bring themselves into accord with God's will and so to aid in the achievement of that will.

No one who reads carefully the religious literature of the present day can be blind to the fact that writers on religious subjects fall into two groups. The one group seeks primarily the development of human nature and makes man the center of the universe. God—though these writers are of course not conscious of it—becomes a means to an end, to be used when and as He can minister to the achievement of man's destiny, when and as He can help forward the development of a larger human fellowship and the attainment by man of greater freedom and greater peace. Such aims are in themselves good, but to make them primary is to misunderstand the whole meaning of life as that meaning has been revealed by our Lord.

The other group of writers, starting with the Christian conception of God, realizes that He is the Source and Center of all things, that the one thing above all else to seek is the fulfilment of His will, and that that will is not the obtaining of fellowship, freedom, peace, or any other good or combination of goods, except as they are parts of God's plan for man, except as they spring out of man's relationship to God and deepen that relationship, and except as they advance God's



## THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

glory. So Christ Himself taught us to pray, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," and only after that, "Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses. . . . And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil."

Now of course it is true that God's will is always for man's good, but God has, as has already been pointed out, given man a share in the fulfilment of this will, and prayer is one of the ways in which man exercises the privilege God has given him. Prayer, as Archdeacon Holmes once wrote, changes God's will from a static to a dynamic condition, or, as it may be put, prayer is the means whereby man puts God's will into operation. St. Paul has told us that we are fellow-laborers with God. We may remember this whenever we pray, and if we do remember it our prayer will be in part taken up with giving God thanks for so great and blessed a privilege.

The fact that God gives us this privilege is a striking evidence of His unselfish love for us. He will not do for us what we can do for ourselves. He insists that as far as possible we work out our own salvation. Unless we do our part, the powers with which He has endowed us will remain undeveloped, and will after a time cease to exist. More than this, He delights in having us work with Him. He could do the work better by Himself, but if He did not call us to share in it He would miss the joy of our coöperation—strange as it may sound, He does find joy in our coöperation—and we should miss the joy of coöperation with Him.

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

Therefore it is that so many things which the world needs desperately it fails to obtain. It is not that God wishes to withhold His blessings. It is that they cease to be blessings unless man prepares himself for them by doing his own share of the work. It is one thing to enjoy a garden which someone has made for us, and quite another thing to enjoy a garden which we have made. Every atom of labor which we have put into the making of the garden, into the sowing of the seed, into the cultivation of the plants and flowers, adds to our enjoyment of the result. We identify ourselves with anything that we make or share in making. It becomes a part of our life and our thought.

Educators recognize that children enjoy the toys which they make for themselves—crude as they often are—much more than they enjoy the most attractive manufactured toys; and the making of the toys has a large place in the development of the children's minds and hands. We are God's children, but God desires that we shall grow up, not that we may escape from His guidance, but that we may have our full part in carrying out the plans which He as our Father, as the Head of our family, makes for us.

3. *It is the purpose of prayer to help our fellow men.* We shall think of this more in detail in connection with intercession, but it may be said here that much that we undertake to do for our fellow men fails of its purpose because it is not conceived and born in prayer. The shores of the Christian ages are strewn with the wrecks of the lives of Christian workers who have

## THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

started out with great enthusiasm and love for mankind, and who have labored unremittingly in order to provide more adequately for the comfort of those for whom they have felt responsibility.

There comes to mind one such person. He was a priest of rather unusual ability, who suddenly found himself in charge of a large parish, who felt his responsibility keenly, and who earnestly strove to live up to it and to be of service to those committed to his care. The strain was great and the result was that in order to relieve the strain, or rather to nerve himself for his duties, he fell into the habit of taking a stimulant before each service. The result was he died in the gutter, not because he was a bad man, but because he had lost sight of the fact that it was only through God's help that he could truly render the service to which he had been called. He relied upon something else, and this not only failed him but led him to disaster.

It is fatally easy to lose oneself quite literally and quite disastrously in the service of one's fellow men, by attempting to help them in one's own strength or by relying upon any power but that of God. Of course all our strength must go into our service, but our real strength is in God, and when we rely on ourselves we inevitably fail. What our fellow men need is God's strength, not ours; and that strength we can bring to them through the complete dedication of ourselves to God, and our prayer on their behalf. We should serve them in every way that is open to us, but no service



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

we may render them will be what it should be unless it grows out of and is accompanied by prayer.

4. *It is the purpose of prayer to aid in our own spiritual growth, in the development of our Christian characters.* Such a purpose is not selfish as some maintain, if it be pursued in right relationship to the great fundamental purpose of which we have spoken. It is not selfish to seek to develop our character; it is only through its development that we can become truly unselfish, can truly render to God the service to which He has appointed us. The cultivation of our spiritual lives demands attention, much more attention than is usually given it. It demands earnest effort. Sometimes it demands fierce conflict. But it can only be accomplished through prayer and through a prayerful attitude.

What is necessary for our spiritual development we may and should seek through prayer. If the material surroundings in which we live are detrimental to spiritual living, we may and should seek through prayer, and of course in any other legitimate way which may be open to us, to change those conditions. If we seek to change them apart from prayer we may indeed succeed, but the probability is that the new conditions in which we find ourselves will be as difficult and as dangerous as the old ones.

We are all too prone to be satisfied with changes which are purely superficial, changes which on the surface seem admirable, but which in the long run mean little or nothing, and which are sometimes positively

## THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

harmful or produce just the results we are striving to avoid. Many of us remember being elated because of what we supposed to be the solutions of problems which in the end proved to be not real solutions but merely complications of the original problems. Problems are not solved satisfactorily, conditions are not changed satisfactorily, apart from God and dependence upon Him. And in this connection we must not forget that prayer is the means through which we obtain pardon, which is one of the fundamental elements in the building of our characters.

5. *It is the purpose of prayer to obtain the things which we need for our minds and for our bodies.* Our physical and our mental condition help or hinder our spiritual progress and our work for God and for our fellow men. People of untutored minds and of feeble bodies have done great things, but the better trained our minds are, and the stronger our bodies, the more effective service we shall render, provided, of course, we use our physical and mental powers in the right way. We therefore pray for whatever may be necessary for their welfare and for guidance in directing them aright, and in doing so we do not for a moment consider that we are seeking unworthy ends or regarding life from a materialistic standpoint.

Prayer, then, is the means through which we obtain the things we need for our minds and for our bodies, through which we help forward the building of our characters, through which we minister to our fellow men. It is the means whereby we coöperate with God



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

in the carrying out of His plan for the universe. Above all, it is the means through which we advance God's glory. The other purposes are important and are closely connected with this great purpose; but they are subordinate. This is primary. This it is which makes prayer so essential to the Christian life.

### III

#### THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

THE SPIRIT of a thing is that which gives it its character. Form and method have their place and are important. They are instruments for the spirit's use, for the expression of its purposes. But form and method have to do rather with the appearance of a thing than with the thing itself. They may help the spirit or they may hinder it, and the spirit can express itself most effectively only when the form and method are perfectly fitted for the performance of their functions. But however imperfect the method, spirit can and often does produce great results. Of form and method we shall think later. The consideration of spirit naturally comes first.

What is the spirit of prayer, the spirit which animates it, which directs it, which makes it one of the great agencies for the cultivation of our relationship to God?

The spirit of prayer is the spirit of sonship. "Thou art no more a servant," says St. Paul, "but a son"; and St. John says, "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." One of the

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

most fundamental truths which Christ made known to the world is the truth that God is the Father of all men. He is the Father of each individual born into this world. All men are His sons, though many fail to appreciate their sonship.

Since we are the sons of God, it is as sons that we approach God in prayer. We come to Him as the Source of our being, as the One from whom we have received our life, as the One who loves us with an everlasting love, who knows our weaknesses and our failures, but whose one aim so far as we are concerned is to bring us back when we go wrong and make us worthy of the great privilege of sonship. Being sons, our approach to God will be:

1. *A reverent approach.* Reverence is of the essence of true sonship. It is indeed of the essence of all satisfying human relationships, whatever be their nature, and it is in a special sense of the essence of our relationship to God. The old word was *fear*, which is not a bad word in itself, but it has been sadly misused. We fear God, not with any servile fear, not because He may punish us if we do wrong, but just because we are His sons. Just because He is what He is we stand in awe of Him.

Reverence, fear, awe, they all come to the same thing, and they all express our sense of God's almighty power, of God's unsullied holiness, of God's enduring love, of God's eternal life, of God's unfailing faithfulness, of God's infinite patience. It is somewhat like the feeling which comes over us when we stand and

## THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

look at a towering mountain peak, at the apparently limitless ocean, at a brilliant sunset, or when we listen to unearthly music. Such experiences we have all had. No words can adequately describe them, but the sensations which they produce remain embedded in our memories, and whenever we recall them, inspire us afresh. The impulse to express in some way what we feel is almost overpowering.

It is not difficult to understand how in some parts of the world men still worship the sun; how in other parts of the world a mountain becomes a kind of national religious symbol, as with Fujiyama in Japan. It is not difficult to understand how the Psalmist, looking up at the heavens on a starry night broke forth into unforgettable words of praise. His praise of course was addressed to God and not to God's works, for he had learned in his childhood that "the earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is; the compass of the world, and they that dwell therein"; that God is the author of creation, and that the works of nature are but expressions of His glory.

It is not difficult to understand how those whose ears are trained to appreciate music find as they listen to great masters that they become oblivious of their physical surroundings and are taken as it were out of themselves. Different people would use different terms to express the feeling which wells up within them, and no one term or set of terms is sufficient to express all that they feel; but the feeling is none the less definite, none the less inspiring and exalting.



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

It is not very different from the sense of awe which comes to the devout worshipper when he realizes God's presence. His impulse is sometimes a confused, almost a tumultuous one. He would fall on his knees, he would lie prostrate before the God whom he worships, he would stand in all the vigor of his manhood and pour forth his words of praise, or sometimes he would just be still, would sit motionless, held by the great reality which embraces him. This sense of awe is necessary to any real religious development, to any true understanding of our relationship to God. To be without it is to fail in the realization of that character of sonship which we can only call ineffable.

2. *A confident approach.* Reverence is essential to the true spirit of prayer, but if it stood alone it would leave us quite unsatisfied. We approach God reverently, but we also approach Him with confidence. We come to Him with quiet trust; we are assured of His love for us, of His understanding of us, of His ability to enter into every thought of our minds, every impulse of our hearts. We have and can have no aim which is without its interest for Him. It may indeed be a wrong aim, but if it is, He is interested in redirecting it, in making it right. It is perfectly possible to be intimate with God, to be utterly without fear in the servile sense of the term, to turn to Him instinctively in all our joys and in all our trials and difficulties.

It is said that familiarity breeds contempt. Whether this is true depends of course upon what is meant by familiarity. Intimacy may breed contempt but it may

on the other hand deepen reverence. The more intimately we know anyone who is worth knowing, the more reverence we have for him. The more intimately we know God, the more we are filled with awe at every discovery to which our intimacy leads, yet the more confidently we approach Him. We go to God as a little child goes to its father, freely, naturally, confident that He will do what He sees to be best for us.

The word *confidence* has been used rather than the word *faith*, because the latter, significant and glorious as it is, is one of the words in our religious vocabulary which has suffered so sadly from misuse. To many people it is but a word stripped of all its content, a word to which they turn when they find themselves facing a problem which they cannot solve, a word which has a kind of hypnotic influence over them, leading them to feel that the problem has been solved by referring it to a realm of which they have had little or no experience. The word *confidence* will bring to most of us a sense of simplicity and of freshness which we so much need in our spiritual lives.

We are confident of God's love for us, a love which is unfailing, which is unconquerable, which is individual and at the same time social, which is the love of a father for his children. We are confident of God's power, a power against which no force in heaven, nor in earth, nor under the earth, can prevail; a power which can and, if we will rely upon it, will ultimately solve all our problems. We are confident of God's wisdom, and the more confident of it when we meet

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

situations which are entirely beyond the compass of our own wisdom, of God's wisdom which sees all the angles and all the aspects of every problem which arises, and which relates every problem to the whole problem of the universe and to His purpose for the universe. We are confident of God's patience, which has borne with the human race through all the years of its existence and has gone on slowly winning man away from his selfish aims, his unworthy ambitions, his low ideals, his unspeakable pettiness, and has, step by step, lifted him to ever higher planes of living, to ever broader realms of understanding. We are God's sons; and what a Father we have, loving, strong, wise, patient! Such a Father we approach with unhesitating confidence.

3. *An unselfish approach.* Our approach to God will be governed, as has already been suggested in a previous chapter, not by what we desire but by what He desires. The Father will know better than the son what is needed in any particular case, whether it concerns one son or all sons, whether it be an individual matter, a community matter, or a world matter. The one thing which the true son seeks is the fulfilment of the Father's will. He comes to the Father to learn what that will is, and to offer himself, all that he has and all that he is, to help in the accomplishment of it. Insofar as he asks for things for himself he will ask for them because he needs them to make him a more worthy son, to enable him to render better service to his Father. He will never present a selfish petition; he will never



## THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

seek for himself anything for himself alone. He is a son of God; he is a member of God's family; and he seeks to serve both in the fullest possible way. Prayer helps to fit him for that service and in part renders the service.

To render this unselfish service to God demands the complete dedication of ourselves to Him, of our bodies, of our souls, of our spirits. There can be no compromise, no holding back, no reserving for ourselves any pet notion or foible or scheme of action. We are God's sons. The one question is what God would have us do, where He would have us be, what failure, what humiliation, what misunderstanding, what pain He would have us endure for His sake.

A prominent business man once went to one of our bishops and said he wished to be baptized. Apparently his thought was that the bishop would welcome him with open arms, and ask no questions. Much to his surprise the bishop did not seem particularly enthusiastic. His advice was: "Think the matter over carefully; the step you are contemplating may mean the turning up-side-down of your life, the abandoning of your business career, the setting out upon new fields of work." It was wise and right advice.

God does not always call us to change the thing we are doing, but we must be ready if He does call us; and we may be sure that He is always calling us to change the spirit in which we are doing our work, to make that spirit ever broader and deeper and more Christlike. In other words, when as sons we approach



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

God in prayer, our prayer will not be merely a matter of uttering words however real and sacred, but a matter of dedicating our lives, of rooting up whatever in them needs to be rooted up, of filling them more and more with the spirit of love and the spirit of service.

4. *A joyous approach.* Reverence toward God, confidence in God, unselfishness in approaching God, will bring a sense of joy such as nothing which is merely of the earth can ever produce. The son naturally enjoys being with his Father, enjoys those ever enlarging visions which his presence with the Father brings, those opportunities of conferring with the Father as to His plans for the redemption of the world. Sonship is in itself a joyous relationship. The prayer of sonship is a joyous experience.

But can we be really joyous in this world, in this world with all its confusion, all its tumult, all its injustices, all its excruciating suffering? Do we not think of Christ Himself as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"? Yes, we do; and we are right in so doing, provided we keep the proportion of truth with regard to Him. He was "a man of sorrows," bearing the sorrows and the sins of the world. He was and is intimately acquainted with all the grief of all the people in the world; but there is another side which we must not forget and which we must not undervalue. The writer of *The Epistle to the Hebrews* tells us that "For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

And the joy was not wholly in the future. There was a joy in looking forward to the fuller joy which was to come, a joy in enduring the cross for the sake of His Father and for the sake of mankind. There was a joy in giving Himself to the uttermost, there was a joy in the consciousness of the love of His Father, a joy which sprang out of His own integrity, His own self-sacrifice, His own unspotted purity.

The joy of which the New Testament tells us is a present joy as well as an anticipated one; not a surface happiness, not a freedom from trial and temptation, from physical, mental, and spiritual pain, but a joy which persists in spite of all these things, a joy which these things cannot destroy. It is the joy of sonship, the joy of being alive with a life that is derived from an all-loving Father, the joy of wholeheartedly serving that Father, the joy of companionship with that Father, the joy of constant converse with Him. It is this converse which we call prayer, and prayer is therefore a joyous experience.

We may describe it under various figures of speech. We may think of it as the coming back to the Father's House, as the throwing of ourselves into the Father's arms, after we have been fighting our way through manifold temptations. We may think of it as the cry of sons to the Father in the midst of temptation. We may think of it as the lifting up of our eyes to the Father's face as we go about our daily work and our daily struggle. An old colored woman said of Father Benson, the saintly founder of the Society of St. John

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

the Evangelist: "He is always looking up; he wears himself out with looking up." Prayer is looking up to the Father. Looking up into a loving face is a joyous experience, and the joy is the greater because of the contrast between it and the thing from which we turn our gaze.

Our Lord, in preparing His disciples for the hardships which they would be called upon to endure, in vivid and compelling language, said to them: "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Yes, it is in the midst of hardships that we may, nay we must, look up, that we may and must turn our faces toward God, that we may and must speak to Him and listen to what He would say to us. This is prayer and this is joy.

Joy is a fundamental element in the spiritual life. We approach prayer in the spirit of joy, and prayer is the gateway to fuller joy. It is true that God sometimes permits us to be deprived of the emotion of joy in order that we may seek Him for His own sake and not for the gratification which comes from seeking Him. But joy is not only or primarily an emotion. It is an experience of the whole being. When we do not feel God near, we know that He is near, and this knowledge is joy. When we cannot speak to Him as we would, when our effort at prayer is feeble and halting, we know that He understands what is in our minds and in our hearts, and this knowledge is joy.

## THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

And when we cannot hear His voice, we can rest in His love, and this resting in His love is joy.

The spirit of prayer, then, is the spirit of sonship, and we, being sons of God, approach God in prayer with reverence, with confidence, with unselfishness, with joy. God is almighty, all-wise; therefore we stand in awe of Him. God loves us with an everlasting love; therefore we come to Him freely, gladly, confidently. God has revealed Himself to us through His Son, and shown us the unselfishness of His own character, His willingness to give Himself completely for and to us; therefore we come to Him in the spirit of giving, of giving ourselves to the utmost without counting the cost. God is the source of our life, the conqueror of sin and death, whose power can never be broken, whose promises of eternal life and of unending fellowship with Him are sure; therefore we come to Him with joy.



## IV

### METHOD IN PRAYER

THE SPIRIT of prayer is of primary importance. No amount of what is ordinarily called technique in our approach to God, no beauty of language, no grace of posture in a merely emotional outpouring, will avail unless our spirit be what it should be, unless we are seeking to advance God's glory and to do His will.

Method is of secondary importance, but this does not mean that it is negligible nor that it can be ignored without serious loss. The truth is that if we are to develop a rich and full prayer life we must adopt not only a method, but a method which is suited to the purpose we have in mind; and this method must be determined in the light of the experience of the saints in all the Christian ages, and in the light of our own temperaments. In the broad sense, there may perhaps be said to be one Christian method of prayer, but this method will vary according to the needs of each individual and according to his particular stage of spiritual development.

Method is necessary in every department of life, but method has its own dangers. It is very easy to

substitute method for spirit, to be satisfied with a mechanical routine. It is for this reason that thoughtful people sometimes think to escape the danger by abandoning method altogether, at least so far as this is possible, and there are not a few earnest and spiritually-minded people who have a rather deep-rooted feeling that in the realm of religion method is entirely out of place. Someone with something of this idea in mind once cried out: "You cannot organize the Holy Spirit." The obvious reply was: "No, but the Holy Spirit can organize us"; and unless we are to cast aside the whole of the Old and the New Testaments and the entire history of God's dealings with men, we are driven to the conclusion that method is as necessary in religion as it is in the ordinary affairs of everyday life.

There are of course some who are temperamentally opposed to following any kind of rule, or who imagine that they are, and who think to maintain their freedom by pursuing their particular object in a way that is peculiarly their own. If we observe them carefully we shall find that in most cases they have simply abandoned one method for another, that while it is true that their method runs counter to the method which is usual, it is method none the less.

Even if it were possible to get on without method, to do so would involve a great waste of time. To do things in an orderly fashion is the gateway to freedom. The more our everyday actions become habits, the more free we are; the more things we do in an orderly

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

way, the more opportunity is left us to devote our attention to the fundamental purpose of life.

If we hope to become effective in any branch of activity, we must begin by reducing to routine as many of the elements of that branch as we can. A piano pupil, for example, can make little progress until he can strike the various keys of the piano sub-consciously, until he can operate his hands and adjust his fingers without thinking about it, until, as we say, these things have become second nature to him. It is possible he may never get beyond this, but it is certain that he must first reach it before he can expect to attain the command of his instrument, indeed before he can expect to make any real progress.

Routine, it is true, may remain only routine, and when it does it is of very little service except in the physical sphere; but routine may also be the basis of progress, the stepping-stone to great accomplishment. This is quite as true in the spiritual as in any other realm. A devout priest has said that we must learn piety just as we learn anything else. We must learn prayer just as we learn anything else. We must have not only a method by which our prayer life is governed, but we must have an intelligent and a right method.

One of the reasons our spiritual development is so slow, one of the reasons why we live on such a low spiritual plane, is that we are unwilling to apply ourselves to what, for a time, will probably prove the drudgery of cultivating the technique of prayer. We

find that doing the same things over and over at the same time each day, rendering the same services, using the same words in prayer, is somewhat dull, and therefore we abandon our effort. But it has been wisely said that there is no royal road to knowledge, and there is certainly no royal road to the development of our prayer life.

If we cannot become competent athletes, or competent musicians, or competent painters, or competent public speakers, or competent engineers, or competent architects, without learning and applying the appropriate method in each case, we certainly cannot expect to become competent Christians, or for that matter competent human beings, without learning and applying the appropriate spiritual method. We cannot hope to become competent in prayer unless we are willing to give the time and the effort necessary to acquire the proper technique. We are told we can only conquer nature by obeying nature. It is equally true that we can only become masters in the spiritual life by obeying the laws of the spiritual life. Indeed, it is only by obeying these laws and applying the methods which obedience to them involves that we can begin to become disciples in the spiritual life.

Some years ago it was the writer's privilege to spend a week conducting a mission in a mining camp. One of the problems which arose had to do with this very matter of teaching method in religion. Some of the people living in the little community believed that it was wrong to go to a Church school because they



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

had been taught that it was sufficient to rely upon the Holy Spirit. To rely upon the Holy Spirit is of course fundamental, but individual response and individual effort are also fundamental. This case is an extreme one, but the principle involved is rather widely applied. Many people believe quite conscientiously that in the spiritual realm there are no such things as laws and that method does not apply. This is a disastrous mistake. It is true that the "wind bloweth where it listeth," that the Spirit of God works as He will, but it is none the less true that He usually works in an orderly way.

There are many people who feel today that the Church is over-organized, that it is unduly anxious about method, that it is crippled by too great a dependence upon routine. No doubt there is an element of truth in this, but to say that there is too much organization is in effect to say that some organization is needed. To say that we are over-anxious about method is at least to suggest that method has its place. To say that we are crippled by routine does not justify the abandoning of routine altogether. We may well pray to be delivered from a merely mechanical performance of religious services, from spending an undue amount of time and energy upon organization, from the deadening effect of routine which is nothing more than routine; but on the other hand we shall not be far wrong in praying that we may so learn to use organization and method and routine that our spirits may be free and may have the fullest opportunity to

develop. Method in prayer is indeed secondary, but it is none the less essential. We need the right spirit in our approach to God; we need also the right method.

What is the right method? Various aspects of it will be suggested and emphasized in later chapters. Here it will perhaps be sufficient to outline it.

First, there should be a *place* for prayer. We may of course pray in any place, but it is reasonably certain that unless we have a fixed place our prayers will not be all that they should be. It has been said that if we do not find God somewhere we shall find Him nowhere. It is equally true that if we do not pray to God somewhere we shall pray to Him nowhere. To have a place for prayer does not mean that we shall not find God elsewhere but rather that by finding Him in one place we may learn to find Him in all places. This is one of the reasons for having church buildings. We call them houses—that is, dwelling-places—of God, and in doing so we do not mean to imply that God is not everywhere, but rather that God, who is everywhere, condescends to our human weakness in revealing Himself to us in particular places. Those who neglect church-going on the ground that they can worship God anywhere usually cease altogether to worship Him, and their religion loses its distinctive character and becomes simply a code of conduct.

And if it is important to have a place for public prayer it is also important to have a place for private prayer. More will be said as to this later on. For the

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

present it will be sufficient to add that unless we do have such a place we shall almost certainly find that our prayers become vague and to a large extent meaningless. We may not at once see why this is true, but a little experience will prove that it is.

Second, there should be *fixed times* for prayer. What these times are will depend on circumstances, but there should be at least a period each morning and a period each evening set apart for rendering worship to God, for giving Him thanks, and for seeking His aid for ourselves and for others. Prayer links us with the eternal world, but so long as we live in a world governed by time, the regulation of time will be of great importance and the fixing of times of prayer will play its part in binding us to the world of eternity.

Third, there should be *an order* in our prayers. Without order we shall waste much of our prayer time. The order may be and should be simple. We may become so accustomed to it that we are not conscious of it, but it should always be present, and it is well from time to time for us to examine ourselves in regard to it. The following order which has already been suggested may be repeated here:

*Silence*, in order to realize God's presence.

*Confession*.

*Petition*.

*Intercession*.

*Thanksgiving*.

*Worship*.

*Silence*, in order the more firmly to fix in our minds

the sense of God's presence, that we may carry it with us into our work.

We may alter from time to time any order which we adopt. We may change our times of prayer and the place in which we pray, as seems wise. The important thing is that times and places are definitely set apart and used, and that there is a definite order. Otherwise we shall find our prayers becoming vague, one-sided, careless, ineffective.

To this chapter it will perhaps be well to add a note about books of private devotion. There are many excellent ones. It will be found that the simplest ones are the best, but it is of vital moment to remember that more and more in our private prayers we should develop our own method along the lines laid down in this chapter, in full reliance upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Forms of prayer are necessary in public corporate worship. We cannot worship together, at least in ordinary cases, unless there is a fixed form to follow, for the reason that if each worshipper follows his own bent the result is utter confusion; but in our private prayer if we are really to grow, we must leave ourselves more and more free, we must increasingly construct our own prayers, pouring out our minds and hearts to God as we are moved by the Spirit, working within the general method which has stood the test of the ages but varying the details of the method in accordance with our spiritual development and our spiritual need.



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

Most of us will need to go back from time to time to devotional books, but to rely on them overmuch is not a sign of spiritual progress. In many instances it is a hindrance to such progress.

All this is but another way of saying that as God becomes more real to us and as prayer becomes a more normal element in our lives, we shall speak to God and listen to Him more and more simply and more and more freely. He is our Father and our Friend. We go to Him as children, as friends. We speak to Him with all the freedom of children and friends but we observe the general method which we have learned from the experience of the devout of all ages, and this is the bulwark of our freedom in approaching Him.

## V

### PREPARATION FOR PRAYER

**M**ETHOD in prayer there must be if we are to develop our prayer life and grow as we should in grace and spiritual strength. But the question is, what method; or perhaps it would be better to put it, what kind of method, because it is the nature of the method rather than the details of it which is of primary importance, though the details have their place and need to be carefully thought out. With the answer to this question we dealt in a general way in the last chapter. We shall take up the more detailed treatment of it now, and shall begin by dealing with *preparation for prayer*.

Someone has said that the education of a child should begin a hundred years before the child is born. This is simply a way of suggesting that education depends to a very large extent upon the point of view, the attitude, and the culture of our ancestors for at least several generations back. It might with equal truth be said that the preparation for prayer should begin a hundred years, or for that matter a thousand years, before we actually undertake to es-

SAN DIEGO CONVOCATION  
OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

establish a definite point of contact with God. This means that the nature of our prayer life, the spirit we put into our prayers, and the effectiveness of them, will, in the final analysis, be found to depend in very large measure upon the spiritual atmosphere in which we have grown up and which has surrounded our parents and grandparents.

There can be no question that heredity in this sense plays an important part in our lives. This is worth remembering, because while this kind of preparation for prayer is made for us rather than by us, yet we may have our share in laying the groundwork for the prayer life of those who come after us—our children and grandchildren, physical and spiritual. If those who have gone before us have been men and women of abiding faith, men and women who have lived in conscious contact with God, our way is the more easy, and because it is, we should be continuously expressing our gratitude to God. If they have not been men and women of faith, our task is the harder, but we may the more zealously gird ourselves for it by realizing our responsibility for those who are to follow us.

This may be called a part of *the remote preparation for prayer*, which also includes our knowledge of God and of the spiritual world. One of the reasons why people find prayer so difficult and so often profitless is that they are not grounded in the Christian Faith, that they do not understand those great fundamental truths which are taught us in the New Testament and which have been enshrined in such compact

## PREPARATION FOR PRAYER

form in the Creeds. When people ask, "How shall I learn to pray more effectively?" the answer frequently is, "By extending and deepening your intellectual grasp of Christian truth." Prayer cannot stand by itself; it is a part of our Christian life. It must have a sure foundation; it must, if it is to be vital, be rooted in a knowledge of those principles which the Christian Church has taught down through the ages.

This is not to say that every Christian should be or can be a theologian in the technical sense of the term, nor would one deny for a moment the reality of the prayers of those untutored people of whom the Church has and probably always will have so many, who, while reading very little religious literature, yet approach God with deep devotion. This simple devotion is one of the most beautiful manifestations of the life of the Spirit in men, but it still remains true that the mind needs to be taught the great truths which God has revealed, and the deeper and fuller the knowledge of these truths the more satisfying our Christian life will be.

It must be admitted that often intellectual knowledge interferes with rather than helps devotion, but this is because our intellectual leaders are so frequently carried away by intellectual pride and because we are carried away with them. If our intellectual study of Christian truth is along the right lines and is pursued in the right spirit we grow more simple as we learn. Truly learned people usually are simple, because



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

knowing much, they realize how much there is to know.

Christianity can satisfy those who have little or no mental capacity; it cannot satisfy those who have mental capacity unless they make full use of that capacity. In other words, those who have minds must use them in their religion, otherwise their religion will prove a failure.

With this as a background we may go on to consider *the more immediate preparation for prayer*. We have many beautiful Collects which have come down to us through the ages and which have been sanctified by long and faithful use. To know them by heart and to make them our own, taking them upon our lips as we are moved to do so, will be a very great help.

We must not, however, be content all our lives with the work of other people, however good those people have been and however admirable their work. Our prayers must be our own. Some have found it helpful to work out their own form of private devotion, to construct their own simple confession, their own acts of faith and love and thanksgiving, their own utterances of praise. This is certainly worth trying, but if the form is really to meet our needs, it must be changed from time to time, and in changing it we must be ready to discard what no longer expresses the inner movements of our spirits. Indeed if we are growing, frequent changes will be needed.

To continue to use a form of prayer after we have

## PREPARATION FOR PRAYER

outgrown it, is to retard our spiritual development and ultimately to stultify our religious life. Since this is so, some prefer not to put on paper any particular form, but simply to work out from day to day in their own minds the form which they use. Perhaps for most of us this is the better way, though one must be on his guard against lapsing into carelessness.

When one actually comes to the time he has set apart for prayer and kneels down before God to hold communion with Him, his first moments must be moments of preparation, and this preparation will consist largely in quieting his own being. Someone has said that if we have only two minutes in which to pray we should use at least one of these minutes in preparation. Many prayers count for very little because we begin them with a sense of hurry and end them in the same way. We may of course cry out to God in any and every emergency. We may approach Him with anguished hearts, we may call upon Him as best we can when we are in a tumult of fear, and then, if we are to have any quiet at all, it must come in answer to our cry. In our normal everyday prayers, however, we must begin with quiet. This quiet comes from God, but it comes none the less through the exercise of our own wills, directed and strengthened by God.

We are to prepare then for prayer by being still. "Be still and know that I am God." "My soul waiteth still"—that is, in stillness—"upon God." The stillness must permeate us. There must be a stillness of body,

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

a stillness of mind, a stillness of spirit. It has been said that it takes twenty-four hours to quiet the more or less panicky pulsations of our bodies. Twenty-four hours, and we have only a few minutes! The twenty-four hours is probably an exaggerated estimate. In any case, in a few minutes we may do much by way of quieting our bodies.

It is important to take an easy and a natural posture. The matter of posture is in itself a very simple thing, but like most other simple things it may become an art. We should begin our prayers by kneeling squarely on both our knees with our bodies erect, bending neither forward nor backward, with our heads slightly bowed. The posture may be changed in the course of our prayers, but we must avoid unnatural positions, for they become distracting. Kneeling in this simple posture, we can relax our muscles and put them at ease; we can set free our nerves; we can be still in body.

There must also be stillness of mind. Is there anyone who has tried to pray who does not know how difficult it is to concentrate his mind upon what he is doing, who does not know how many unbidden thoughts crowd in? One of the difficulties is that the body is not first quieted. Another is that we make too much effort at concentration, we center our minds upon our minds instead of centering them upon God and opening them to Him. Simply reminding ourselves that we are in God's presence and that God is waiting to listen to our prayers and to make Himself

## PREPARATION FOR PRAYER

known to us, will often bring a sense of release and of strength.

And the spirit must be still. Stillness of spirit follows rather naturally upon stillness of mind. It is difficult to describe; indeed there is no language in which it can be described adequately. It is however a matter of experience, and the experience is the result of trust in God. The body and mind at rest, the spirit rests also, rests in and upon God, is no longer harassed by fear of evil but is so assured of God's presence and love, and of its own oneness with God, that it loses itself in that most precious of all fellowships, fellowship with its Creator, its Master, its Friend.

Thus are we prepared to pray. The remote preparation will of course take much time, but it will be spread over a period of years. The immediate preparation will take but little time, but this little time is of great importance. Indeed it is of prime importance if we are to pray as we should and as we wish to pray.



## VI

### CONFESSION

HAVING prepared ourselves for prayer by stillness, or, if one prefers, having begun our prayer with stillness, with the realization that we are in God's presence and with the consciousness of His abiding love, we proceed to speak to Him, and the first item in our speaking will be the confession of our sins. Some modern psychologists are inclined to question this order and to complain because our public services usually begin in this way; but deeper thought seems to lead to the conclusion that this is the best way because it is the natural way.

Just as Isaiah, realizing the presence of God, felt keenly his need of cleansing and cried out: "I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips"; and just as St. Peter, awed by the presence of his Master and the miracle which he had just witnessed exclaimed: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord"; so the present-day Christian, however developed he may be spiritually, however saintly a life he may be living, when he becomes conscious of

## CONFESSION

God's presence, keenly realizes how far he falls short of the divine pattern, how many sins he has committed, and how great his need of forgiveness is. Out of this consciousness of sin he makes his confession; and he makes it not in a careless, haphazard, emotional way, but in a calm and orderly way. He begins by asking himself in God's presence just what his sin is, or rather just what his sins are. In other words, he examines his conscience. He looks back over the hours which have preceded his prayer, over the day—if he is saying his prayers at night—and questions himself as to his deeds, as to his words, and as to his thoughts. He examines his motives and his general attitude toward God and toward men.

This perhaps seems a rather ambitious program and one which will require much time. As a matter of fact, after just a little training in prayer and a little experience in self-examination, the time required for such a searching of one's conscience is very brief indeed. Like a flash the day will stand out. Each of its occurrences will be clear. The grounds one has for thanksgiving will be evident and so will one's failures and sins.

The discerning of one's motives will not be at first quite easy because consciousness of sin brings humiliation, and we naturally seek to avoid being humiliated. We tend to excuse ourselves, to blame other persons, or to conclude that circumstances are responsible. All our lives we shall need to be on our guard against this tendency, but if in the beginning of our prayer

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

life we resolutely determine to be honest with ourselves, honesty will become more and more fixed as the days and years go by, and we shall see our motives as they are and face them squarely and courageously.

Having brought our sins to the light we shall confess them one by one. It is not enough simply to ask God to forgive us, any more than it is enough to ask a friend we have wronged to forgive us. We must acknowledge specifically the sins of which we have been guilty. We must tell God just where we were wrong, where and how we gave way to unkindness in thought, word, or deed, how we misjudged someone else, how hurried and poor our devotions were, how we neglected our prayers and our Bible reading, how we left undone some act of kindness which would have meant much to a member of our family or to a neighbor, how we behaved unbecomingly to one of God's children. People say God knows all these things, and this of course is true; but God also knows our needs, and yet we approach Him with our petitions. He expects us to do this; and so too He expects us to tell Him one by one our sins, not in order that we may give Him information which He will otherwise lack, but in order that we may clear our own consciences and set ourselves right in our own sight as well as in His.

Many years ago the writer heard Bishop Osborne, then Bishop of Springfield, say in a sermon that there were many people who never in all the course of their lives confessed their sins. The statement was rather

startling at the time, but there has been abundant opportunity since then to realize its truth. People have a vague kind of regret that they have sinned, a feeling of restlessness and discomfort because they have fallen below the standard they have set for themselves, and in many cases they do ask God in a general way to pardon them, but this is not confession of sin. It is in a rather remote way an acknowledgment that we have sinned. A confession of sin is a definite thing, and if we really seek forgiveness, the least we can do is to tell God wherein we have sinned and to ask His pardon for each transgression. St. John says: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

There are many who take the ground that teaching such as this is mistaken. Some say it is mistaken because it implies a morbidness with regard to sin and that the healthy-minded thing is to forget our sins and to go on our way as if nothing had happened—that looking back simply involves waste of time. The truth is, it is practically impossible to forget our sins, and when we think we have forgotten them, what we have really done is lodged them securely in our subconscious minds. There is of course a morbid attitude toward sin, but the one sure way to avoid this attitude is to bring our sins to the light, to confess them, and to ask forgiveness for them. When we have done this we may not be able to forget them, but we shall be able to remember them in the right way—that is, as sins which God has put away.



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

Others are thoughtless enough and superficial enough to think that they have no sins to confess. It seems impossible that anyone who has clearly realized the loftiness of the Christian standard and the frailty of human nature could for a moment say of himself, "I have no sins," or say of anyone else, "He has no sins." As a matter of fact, the nearer people come to God the more keenly they realize how sinful they are and the less they are inclined to speak of any sins as little. The Bible is very clear in its teaching that there is no man that sinneth not; and Christian experience agrees with the teaching of the Bible.

Confession of sin involves *sorrow for sin*. It is not enough merely to tell God our sins one by one. This is a rather useless process unless we are sorry for our sins. It is usually sorrow for sin which leads us to confess it, so that we need to be quite clear as to what sorrow for sin means. People are not infrequently disturbed because the contemplation of their sins does not arouse in them a rather violent emotional reaction.

In some cases it does arouse such a reaction, but in many cases it does not. Indeed one may be so crushed by the sense of sin that his feelings are numbed. Or one may see his sins very clearly, and because of certain physical conditions or for some other reason have no feeling about them at all, yet he may be deeply sorry for them. For sorrow for sin means simply that one sees one's sin in its true light and sincerely regrets it, just as one may have made a disastrous mistake in some financial dealing and may regret it without being

## CONFESSION

emotionally stirred at all. Most of us have had this kind of experience. We do not know why our feelings are not stirred. We only know that they are not. So far as sin is concerned they may be quite passive, and yet one may so regret his sin that he is willing to take any step which may be necessary to uproot it. In other words, sorrow for sin is an act of the will by which one separates himself as far as he can from his sin.

Sorrow for sin will also involve a real determination to escape sin in the future. This we call *purpose of amendment*. The difference between sorrow for sin and purpose of amendment is that one looks to the past while the other looks to the future; but the basic attitude is the same in both cases. And if we are sorry for our sins we shall make amends, so far as we can, for them.

If we have taken anything from anyone unjustly, we shall restore it at the earliest possible moment; if we have misrepresented anyone, we shall do our utmost to correct the misrepresentation; if we have hurt another's feelings, we shall make an earnest effort to heal the wound which we have inflicted; if we have neglected our prayers, we shall be the more earnest in prayer in the future; if we have been dishonest with ourselves, we shall determine that by God's help we shall henceforth deal with ourselves without any kind of equivocation.

Confession of sin is a very searching exercise. We rather naturally shrink from it, but it is of the utmost

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

importance if we are to make any real spiritual progress and if we are to grow daily in grace, in knowledge of self, and in knowledge of God. An ancient Greek philosopher said: "Know thyself." This is advice that should be heeded; but every Christian must go much further. To know himself is essential, but it is only the first stage in a process. Knowing his blessings, he will thank God for them; knowing his needs, he will ask God to supply them; knowing his sins, he will confess them and seek God's forgiveness.

And what an unspeakable blessing God's forgiveness is! It may come to us directly or it may come to us through the absolution pronounced by a priest; but in both cases the realization of its coming is an experience which, though beyond the power of words to express, one cannot forget. It removes the barrier which our sin has erected between God and ourselves, and perhaps between ourselves and our fellow men. It brings us back into the sunlight of God's love which our sin has shut from us. It is the loosing of the chains which have bound us; it is the opening of the prison house in which we have been confined; it is the bringing to us of joy and freedom and peace; it is the releasing of those great powers with which God has endowed us but which our sin has prevented us from using in the right way and to the fullest extent.

Forgiveness lifts us out of our restlessness and gives us a sense of poise and of security; it changes the very color of our lives and enables us to face the world with-

## CONFESSION

out fear, to mingle with our fellow men freely and naturally, and to look up into God's face with humble gratitude for the blessed gift which He has bestowed upon us and for the close fellowship with Himself to which He has restored us.



## VII

### PETITION

**I**N THE early stages of our prayer life petition is regarded as almost the whole of prayer. When children are taught to pray they are usually taught to ask God for protection, for forgiveness, for the supplying of their material needs, and for power to overcome temptation. They are taught little else about prayer except that they should add a general intercession for their near relatives and friends. There are thousands of Christians who never get beyond this stage, and while they hear from time to time sermons or addresses in which they are taught that prayer is a much larger thing than this, they do not, as a matter of fact, extend their prayer life at all.

Our faulty teaching of children no doubt explains in a very large measure why prayer has so comparatively small a place in the life of the average Christian and why it is so limited in its scope. There would seem to be no reason why children should not be taught to thank God, to praise God, to confess their sins to God, and to intercede systematically for their fellow men. Of course some children are so taught, but it is to be

feared that the number is very, very small. Petition—that is, seeking from God the things which we need—is an important element in prayer, but if it be regarded either as the whole of prayer or as the major part of it, we become spiritual paupers. If we turn to God only when we feel in special need of His help, we cultivate toward Him a relationship which is essentially selfish.

As has already been pointed out, there are multitudes of people who seem to regard God as a means to an end, the end being the accomplishment of their own will. Such a relationship belittles God to such an extent that He ceases to be an object of worship, and it degrades those who allow it to continue. People who are very adverse to accepting charity from their fellow men are content to accept all that they can get from God and are quite unconscious that by such an attitude they have become beggars, ready to receive, but with little concern as to what they give or whether they give anything.

Pride is a deadly sin, but there is such a virtue as self-respect, and it needs to be constantly cultivated not only in our dealings with others but also in our dealings with God. A beggar is not one who seeks help for himself—for in one way or another we must all do this—but one who, seeking help for himself, never gives help or gives it only when he feels so inclined. If we are to maintain our spiritual self-respect, we must do something more than ask God for benefits. We must offer as well as ask, we must give as well

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

as receive, we must worship as well as present our petitions.

In the present state of thought about prayer it seemed necessary, before dealing specifically with petition, to say all this in order to clear our thinking about the matter, and in order to keep petition in its right relationship to the other elements in prayer. This having been said, emphasis may be laid upon petition with less danger of misunderstanding.

Petition is important—very important indeed—and it is safe to say that comparatively few people fully realize its importance. Even those who regard it as synonymous with prayer do not usually make very much of it except in the crises of their lives, and even then it is often accompanied by a certain superstitious attitude, while those who have passed beyond the early stages of prayer are always in danger of giving it too limited a place, of regarding it as a stage of prayer which they have outgrown. The consequence is that they sometimes place a false emphasis upon thanksgiving and praise—not too great an emphasis in itself, but an emphasis which is out of proportion. In order to escape a materialistic attitude, they go to the other extreme and ignore petition—at any rate for material things—almost entirely. This of course means that they unconsciously leave God out of a large part of their lives, and that in their thinking they separate Him practically, if not theoretically, from any real relationship to the material world.

There is great need of balance in religion, and per-

haps especially in the realm of prayer. We shall put petition in its right place if we compare our relationship to God with our relationship to our dearest earthly friend. With this earthly friend we share our lives as fully as we can. We talk over with him all that concerns ourselves as well as all that concerns him. Our relationship is in no sense a selfish one, but when we have a material need we turn to him first of all, partly because we know that he will understand our need, and partly because we know that he will regard it as a privilege to supply it as far as in him lies. Not to turn to him would imply a defect in our friendship. We go to him with our needs just as freely as we go to him with our joys and our gratitude. The various elements which make up our friendship fall naturally into their proper places.

So it is in our relationship with God. If we are really in tune with Him, we never for a moment say or think that our material needs are too small to take to Him. We know that He loves us and therefore that He is interested in everything that concerns us. He is interested in our having proper food and proper clothing, in our having a happy home, in our living in a healthy environment. He is interested in our work, in our pleasures, in our rest, as well as in those things which more directly concern our spiritual welfare.

This is the answer to the question which is frequently asked: "Have I a right to ask God for material things?" The word *right* is not a particularly happy one in this connection. It should rather be said



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

that to ask God for material things is both our duty and our privilege, and that it is His wish that we should ask Him.

As has been said in a former chapter, if we are to keep our relationship to God clear, we must go to Him with all that is in our minds and in our hearts. We need not for a moment hesitate to pray for material things, but we do need to be careful not to seek our own will in regard to material things, not to ask for things merely to satisfy our desire to indulge ourselves, not to ask for anything in a selfish spirit, but to ask none the less for everything which we may need for the building up of our bodies, our minds, and our spirits, so that we may be the better children of God and may the more effectively serve Him.

Our Lord Himself taught us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread," and it is reasonably certain that this petition includes food for our bodies as well as food for our souls. Since the Son of God became Man, no one who believes in Him has any excuse for ignoring or thinking lightly of the body or those things which have to do with its welfare any more than he has excuse for ignoring or thinking lightly of the things which concern the welfare of his higher nature. The body is of course lower than the spirit, but it has great influence on the spirit for good or for ill. It is our privilege and our duty, then, to pray for the material things which we need.

It is our privilege and our duty to pray for the

proper training of our minds; for guidance in our education both while we are at school and afterwards; for the power to think clearly; to learn to discriminate between true and false processes of thinking, between true and false conclusions; for the power to assimilate that which is good in our reading and study and to discard that which is bad; for poised minds as well as for poised bodies.

It is of course our privilege and our duty to pray for the cultivation of our Christian character; for the development of all the Christian virtues; for protection in our temptations; for forgiveness of our sins; for a clearer vision of God and of spiritual things; for growth in prayer and in spiritual understanding; for the ability to discern and respond to every movement of the Spirit within us; for an ever-deepening gratitude for the blessings God bestows upon us, and a growing ability to express this gratitude; for the power to teach others those things which God has taught us; and for such whole-hearted trust in and dependence upon God as will create an atmosphere in which it is simple and natural for others to depend upon God and to surrender themselves to Him.

What a wonderful time one may have in thus presenting his petitions to God! What an expansion of the spirit is involved! What a joy and a power it is to go to God with all these various and varying needs! How the going to Him enlarges our outlook upon life, how it deepens and refines our relationship to Him, how it helps us to rise above the fear of what with

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

many has come to be the bogey of natural law, and how simple, real, and blessed it makes the whole of our lives! Is there any more delicate compliment we can show our friend than by opening to him our minds and our hearts both with regard to the larger and with regard to the lesser things that are in them? And can we in any better way show God our love and reverence for Him than in going to Him freely with every need?

We cannot safely draw too fine a distinction between petition on the one hand, and praise on the other. Actually, the two go hand in hand; each strengthens the other. Without the one the other is not quite complete. As the mother delights to have her child come to her in all his needs, as a friend is grieved if the other party to friendship will not let him share in little things as well as in great, so we may be sure God expects us to pour out to Him our every desire which we regard as legitimate, and indeed every wrong desire as well. He wants the one brought to Him that He may grant it so far as may be good for us; He wants the other brought to Him that He may help us to put it aside. And bringing these things to Him is not only petition; it is praise as well, it is honoring Him by seeking the fulfilment of His will.

Prayer which is all petition is defective prayer; prayer which is without petition is also defective prayer. In perfect prayer, petition takes its natural place along with confession, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

## VIII

### INTERCESSION

**P**ETITION is seeking help from God for oneself and one's own needs. Intercession is seeking help from God for others and their needs. The former is of great importance; the latter is of much greater importance because it reaches so much further, and takes us, if we will go, to the uttermost corners of the earth. In the Lord's Prayer the two are linked together. The pronouns, except those which refer to God, are all plural. What we seek for ourselves we seek also for others. In this way our Lord linked all His children very closely together in prayer and thereby indicated that it is His will that in our prayers we should seek the good of all men.

St. Paul, in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, writes: "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth"—so the passage is translated in the King James Version; but the word "wealth" does not occur in the original. A better translation would be: "Let no man seek his own things, or his own good, but every man the things, or the good, of another." The Apostle is not writing of prayer, but what he says may be



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

applied to it. He would be the last to discourage praying for oneself, but we may without hesitation claim his authority for the contention that insofar as our prayers consist of requests, requests for the good of others should have the larger place. In other words, our requests should be truly unselfish. To be selfish in our prayers is to run counter to the very idea of prayer, and so a selfish prayer defeats its own end.

Intercession, therefore, apart from the good it does to those for whom it is offered, does good to the intercessor, for it widens the scope of his prayer, and indeed of his whole life, and links him with God in love toward all mankind.

Intercession may be regarded from various points of view, and we need so to regard it in order to understand it in its fulness.

1. It may be regarded as *the concentration of our spiritual energy upon those for whom we pray*, so that they are enveloped in an atmosphere in which their own spiritual life is quickened, the fight against temptation is rendered more easy, and faith, hope, and love are all deepened. In a former chapter we thought of prayer as a means whereby we realize the spiritual atmosphere which surrounds us. When we have realized this atmosphere and become conscious of the presence of God and of His angels, by means of intercession we breathe the atmosphere out, as it were, for those for whom we intercede.

It is a fact of common knowledge that we can and do influence people to a very great extent by our

## INTERCESSION

thought—by the whole character and content of our thought—but more especially by our thought when directed toward them. Thought, even when not translated into definite external acts, reaches out beyond ourselves and penetrates the life about us. Thoughts of sickness, for example, tend to produce sickness not only in ourselves but in others. Thoughts of health tend to produce health. Loving thoughts produce one kind of atmosphere; unloving thoughts an atmosphere of quite a different kind. “As he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

It may be said further that as one thinketh in his heart, so he helpeth or hindereth those about him; and the help or hindrance is not the less effective because it is often unconscious, or rather subconscious. Strangely enough, we are not always clearly conscious of just what we are thinking, nor are we always clearly conscious of those about us; but none the less our thoughts affect them, and it seems to be well established now that our thoughts affect not only those who are physically present with us but often those who are at great distances from us.

To think therefore of people lovingly, for their good, and from God's standpoint, is to surround them with an atmosphere—perhaps we may say with an energy—which is very potent. All this is very much more than thought transference as that term is usually understood. It is the definite linking of our thought to God's thought, God's will, and God's power. It is not a merely natural thing, it is a supernatural thing.

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

If this is true, it follows that we have a very definite responsibility for the character of our thoughts. They may do harm beyond our power to express or even to imagine. One wonders how many lives are ruined because their attitude toward God and their fellow men and toward the purpose of their own existence is warped by the wrong thinking of those with whom they come into contact. What the people with whom we are thrown say, of course, has its influence upon us, but we are influenced also by their thoughts which are not put into words.

In the physical realm there are carriers of disease, of typhoid fever, for example. These disease carriers are not always ill themselves, but they scatter germs which make other people ill. It is reasonably certain that there are disease carriers in the realm both of the mind and of the spirit. Those who carry intellectual and spiritual illness can scarcely be well themselves, though their own illness may not be as serious as that of the people whom they infect. But there is another side to this truth: it is possible to carry health as well as sickness. Intercession offered in the right spirit is one of the great means of carrying health; of healing disease, physical, intellectual and spiritual, and also of preventing it.

More than this, it would seem to be safer to bring our influence to bear upon people through intercession than to try to influence them directly, though direct influence of course has its place and is often a duty; for intercession is by its very nature an effort

to help people by lifting them up to God. This may be true of our efforts at direct influence, but we know that very frequently it is not.

Intercession viewed from this standpoint is more than a specific request or a series of specific requests to God for the needs of others. It is an attitude, an attitude of our whole being. Specific requests there must be, but these are not the whole of intercession by any means.

2. Intercession may, in the second place, be regarded as *the bringing of others to God*. It may be compared to the act of the four of whom we are told in the Gospels, who bore a sick man, a paralytic, to our Lord, and opening the roof of the house in which He was, let the man down before Him. We are not told that they asked our Lord to heal him; their act constituted their request. In somewhat the same way we may think of bringing to and laying down before God all those for whom we pray. We become in this way spiritual shepherds, seeking the welfare of sheep, bringing to our Lord those who are lost, those who are sick, those who are tempted, those who are confused and discouraged.

We are rather prone to think that there is very little we can do for others. We often long for money, that we may supply their financial needs; for healing power, that we may make them well; for the ability to solve their problems, of one kind or another, by saying just the right word, by removing obstacles from their way, by giving strength where it is needed;



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

and when we can do none of these things, we all too often fold our hands in something which is akin to despair and feel that we are useless. The fact is that we may do all these things, or may make it possible for them to be done, by bringing the needy ones in prayer to God. If we did but realize this our intercessions would take on new interest and new vigor, and we should find them a joy instead of a burden. No one can have interceded earnestly over even a comparatively short period without being gladdened by many evidences of the power of his intercessions.

It is to be feared that we frequently offer our intercessions in a half-hearted way and do not expect any results from them. We must not indeed always expect to *see* the results of our prayers. Often we shall not see them; often we shall see them only after a long time. But in many instances we shall see them, and in some instances in a very short time.

In the first chapter of St. John's Gospel we are told that St. Andrew, having spent a part of a day with our Lord, afterwards brought his brother, St. Peter, to Him. The passage reads: "He brought him to Jesus." It will be our privilege to bring some people to Jesus directly, as St. Andrew brought his brother, but there will be others, many of them, whom we can only bring to Jesus in prayer. Yet we must remember that this is a very real and effective way to bring them.

3. Once again intercession may be regarded as *sharing in our Lord's work of redemption*. He gave His

life on the Cross that mankind might be redeemed from sin, but He has assigned us a part in bringing to men the redemption which He wrought. This redemption is brought to men in many ways, through preaching, through the Sacraments, through individual guidance; but it is brought also through intercessory prayer. From this standpoint intercession is a giving of ourselves with our Lord, a pouring out of our lives, an offering of them as a sacrifice. It was the pouring out of Christ's life upon the Cross that wrought redemption. It is by the pouring out of our lives in union with the Cross and the crucified Christ that we share in redemption, and in the power to redeem.

Intercession does not consist merely in the saying of words, however sacred those words may be. It is a bearing of the Cross, the giving out of energy and of life, that that energy and life may be conveyed to others. Every earnest intercession therefore links us with Calvary and with Good Friday. It is a very sacred and a very beautiful thing, the full significance of which cannot be put into words.

Our Lord bade His disciples take up their cross and follow Him. The first reference of the words is no doubt to self-discipline and self-sacrifice, but these are not things which can be understood by themselves. Self-discipline is making a disciple of oneself; self-sacrifice is presenting oneself as a sacred offering. But when one becomes a disciple and when one gives himself to God, he is thereby caught up into the great redemptive process. This it is for which men become

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

disciples of Christ; this it is for which men give their lives to Christ: that they may help Him lead mankind back to the Father; that they may help Him bring men forgiveness of their sins and reconcile them to God.

When Samuel was making his farewell address to the Children of Israel and was withdrawing from his position of leadership in favor of Saul, the king who had been chosen to rule over Israel, he used these very significant words: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." He did not say: "God forbid that I should sin against *you*," though neglecting to pray for his people would have been a sin against them. His thought took a much wider range. His mind was centered upon God's great love for those whom He had singled out as His own people, and over whom He yearned as a father yearns over His children. God longed that they should be true to their high calling; He longed to save them from giving way to the temptations by which inevitably they would be confronted, and Samuel felt it his duty, as well as his privilege, to do all that in him lay to bring about the satisfaction of God's longing. He had ruled God's people wisely and well, but now a king had come to take his place. He was permitted to rule them no longer. He could, however, serve them through intercession, and through his intercession for them he could serve God. Not to intercede for them would be a sin against them. It would also be a sin against God; and to sin against God was more serious

than to sin against them. So he declared: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

If we are to make the most of our privilege of intercessory prayer, it will be necessary for us to be systematic, to have a definite plan and to follow it. Inasmuch as the need for intercession far transcends the time and strength we can give to it, we must make the best use of the time and strength that we have. To this end it will be found helpful to have a book—a loose-leaf book will be best—in which to keep lists of those for whom we pray. The lists will, of course, be altered more or less frequently. When persons have been granted those things for which we have asked, we shall remove their names from our book, first having offered our fervent thanksgivings; and as time goes on and more urgent needs come to our knowledge, we shall drop out those whose needs are less urgent, not because we wish to do this, but because our time and strength are limited.

It will be well to assign certain days to certain classes of people, or certain objects. Each one should work this out in his own way. Just in order to make clear what is meant the following arrangement for the days of the week is suggested:

MONDAY. *Those for whom we have a definite responsibility:* our relatives, our friends, our godchildren, our employers or employees.

TUESDAY. *The nation, the state, the city, or the rural community.* On this day we shall pray for the Presi-



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

dent, the Governor, the Mayor, for Congress, the Legislature, the Board of Aldermen, the Courts; for charitable organizations; for the establishment of social justice, etc.

WEDNESDAY. *The Church*: the clergy, the Presiding Bishop, the Bishop of our Diocese, diocesan organizations, the clergy of our own parish, our parish organizations, Church unity, persecuted Christians, etc.

THURSDAY. *Missions*. In this connection it will be helpful to learn the names and to hunt up and impress upon our minds the likenesses of the various Missionary Bishops, the names of outstanding missionary institutions—schools, hospitals, etc. Naturally we shall be especially interested in some one or more missionaries whom we know personally or concerning whom we have more or less detailed information.

We should pray also for the solution of missionary problems, such as the problem of self-support, the problem of the most effective methods of evangelism, the problem of the right attitude toward native religions, etc.

FRIDAY. *The world*: the various peoples of the earth—their needs and their rulers; international understanding and coöperation, and world peace.

SATURDAY. *The departed*. This list will grow with the years and the more it grows, the nearer the larger life will seem. As we mourn the going of loved ones, life is apt to acquire a tone of loneliness and uncertainty; but if we realize our oneness with those who have gone into the other world, that loneliness will to

a very large extent vanish, and will be replaced by a sense of rich fellowship; and that uncertainty will grow into a blessed assurance.

Intercession for the departed holds but a small place in the prayers of many earnest Christians. This is not as it should be. We pray for our friends when they are ill and we usually ask for their recovery. There will be many times, however, when it is reasonably clear that it is God's will to take them out of this life. It is God's will that we are seeking, and our intercessions at such times will keep this will steadily in view, however much we may shrink from having our friends taken from us. We pray that, if it be His will to take them, He will prepare them for their going, He will deepen their penitence, He will enrich their faith, He will intensify their love, He will enable them to face death without fear, with that confidence and that joy with which a traveler contemplates his return to his home. We commend them to God's care and keeping, and give them back to Him, not haltingly or unwillingly, but gladly, in spite of our grief and our tears.

And naturally we seek God's aid for ourselves. We pray for grace and courage to face aright our bereavement, and we ask God through this bereavement to fit us for our own going into His nearer presence, whenever it may be His will to take us unto Himself.

Sunday should be kept for *thanksgiving*, of which we shall think in the next chapter.

It will readily be seen that, as was said at the beginning of this chapter, intercession will take us to the

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

uttermost corners of the earth, if we are ready to go. It will link us with all the nations of the world, with all types of people, with every kind of need, and, above all, it will draw us nearer to the Cross and to Christ crucified and risen, who is at the right hand of God, who ever liveth to make intercession for us.

## IX

### THANKSGIVING

**G**RATITUDE is not listed either among the cardinal or the theological virtues, but there are few thoughtful people who will question the statement that it is fundamental to anything like completeness of character. Certainly it plays a large part in the character which is distinctly Christian. To be without it is to fall very far short of the Christian standard. Indeed, it may be said to fall so far short that the character which is without it cannot be called Christian at all. One may, of course, be very grateful without being a Christian, but one cannot be a Christian in any real sense without being in some degree grateful; and the deeper and more far-reaching his spirit of gratitude, the nearer he comes to the likeness of Christ.

In the Parable of the Ten Lepers our Lord indicated how common ingratitude is. Of the ten whom He healed only one returned to give thanks, and he was a Samaritan—that is, he was not of the chosen people, not one of those who laid so much emphasis on their relationship to God and boasted of the many things God had done for them. It is quite possible to



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

boast of what God has done for us and yet be lacking in gratitude to Him. One all too often receives gifts with the feeling that he is entitled to them and that he who bestows them has only done what might be rightly expected of him. Such a feeling is the very negation of gratitude.

It may be well to ask just what gratitude is. What are the elements of which it is composed?

1. *A consciousness of benefits received.* The benefits may have been received by us, or by someone else in whom we are interested, for benefits bestowed upon those in whom we are interested are to some extent benefits bestowed upon us, and we have a real share in them.

2. *A realization of the fact that these benefits are bestowed as a matter of bounty.* We do frequently and rightly express our thanks to people who fulfil obligations to us, but in such cases we are expressing, not so much gratitude, as gratification that the obligations have been fulfilled. Gratitude in the deeper meaning of the term always has in it a sense of bounty, a sense of undeserved benefit.

3. *A feeling of satisfaction and of joy.* We cannot be grateful without being in some degree glad, in some degree satisfied with that which we have received, without a sense of joy for what has been done to us or for us. The particular benefit bestowed may be one which causes inconvenience and perhaps pain but, if we realize that it is a benefit, we experience a

sense of satisfaction, we rejoice even though it be through tears.

4. *A sense of humility.* When we deserve a benefit which is bestowed upon us, when we have a right to expect it, we are apt to receive it with a feeling of pride, but to receive that which we do not deserve and which we have no right to expect brings inevitably a feeling of humility. The reality and depth of gratitude may indeed be measured by the degree of humility which accompanies it and which goes to make it what it is.

5. *A reaching out of our whole being by way of appreciation toward the person or persons from whom the benefit comes.* What we mean by appreciation is difficult to express, but it is none the less real. Whether we can express it or not, we all know how common it is and how it enriches our life.

These elements taken together make up the fundamental virtue of gratitude. They will be mingled in different proportions in different people, but where gratitude is real and approaches completeness, all of them will be found. A study of them will reveal how essential they all are to a well-rounded character.

Gratitude expresses itself partly in words, partly in general attitudes, and partly in specific acts. It is entirely possible for one to be eloquent in the expression of gratitude, and yet fall far short of those attitudes and acts which indicate that the gratitude lies deeper than words. Here, as elsewhere, it is all too easy to be deceived by, and to be satisfied with, what is merely

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

external. To be thus satisfied indicates a serious flaw in character and militates against its true development.

Gratitude is essential in our relationships with our fellow men. Without it life, as we know it, would not survive very long. Some measure of gratitude is found in very undeveloped people and in very early stages of human progress.

Gratitude is much more essential in our relationship with God. He who is lacking in gratitude to God is cut off from the deeper knowledge of Him. He who is not grateful is selfish, and a selfish man's vision of God is blurred and misleading. A true knowledge of God leads to gratitude, and gratitude leads to a true knowledge of God. The two things act and react upon each other. Growth in Christian character will always be marked by growth in gratitude to God.

In this chapter we are thinking more especially of gratitude to God and of its expression as an element in prayer, an element which is of the utmost importance and which we need to be constantly cultivating.

Let us center our attention upon some of the grounds we have for gratitude to Him, upon some of the things for which we should be always giving Him thanks. We shall do well to recall the words of the General Thanksgiving in Morning and Evening Prayer in the Prayer Book: "We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory."

## THANKSGIVING

We could scarcely have a better general statement, or one which more clearly indicates the lines along which our thanksgiving should proceed. We thank God because He has created us; we thank Him because He has preserved the life—physical, mental, and spiritual—which He has imparted; and because of the various blessings which He has bestowed upon us in the different departments of life. But we thank Him especially for His inestimable love, which not only cannot be expressed but cannot be measured in any adequate way; for His love manifested in the redemption of the world, which He has wrought through His Son, who, by His life and by His death upon the Cross, set us free from the bondage of sin. And we thank Him for the means of grace: the Church, the Scriptures, the Sacraments, all of which link us to that redemption He has wrought, and are means through which His power is conveyed to us. We thank Him further for the hope of glory held out to us, for the hope of endless life beyond the grave, endless life with Him, not merely life which goes on forever, but life which goes on forever in company with Him and all the hosts of heaven.

These are our chief grounds for thanksgiving, and the Church has rightly put them in our daily common prayers. They are grounds for gratitude not only on a particular day but on all the days of our life.

As to more detailed grounds for thanksgiving, they are innumerable. Each day will have its own. In our evening prayers we shall wish to thank God not only



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

for our life in general but for the life we have enjoyed that day; for our food, our clothing, our homes, our family, our friends, our work, our recreation; for our membership in the Church and our knowledge of God which has come to us through that membership; for the privilege of prayer and worship; for opportunities for self-discipline and self-sacrifice; for helpful contacts with people; for opportunities for service; for health and strength; for freedom from suffering, for strength to endure suffering, and for the privilege through suffering of sharing the Cross with Christ; for the ability to enjoy the blessings we have received; for advancement in knowledge, intellectual and spiritual; for opportunities for reading and study; for the splendor of the world, the glory of the sunshine, the beauty of trees and flowers, of mountains and hills, of seas and rivers; for the rain and the snow; for the ever-changing clouds; for every evidence of God's life and love written on earth and sky; and for the revelation of our oneness with those who have passed beyond the life we live here.

Yes, we shall wish to thank God for all these things. We shall not be able to mention them all each time we pray, but we shall come back to them all from time to time, not only in our stated hours of prayer but as we go about our work, as we sit quietly in our rooms, as we enjoy our out-of-door exercise, as we travel from place to place.

How innumerable are the bases for thanksgiving! How impossible it is adequately to thank God for His

## THANKSGIVING

loving-kindness, His power, His wisdom, His beauty! It would enrich our life to stand before a great painting, to admire it, to enter as completely as we could into the mind of the artist who painted it. It would enrich our life to sit quietly and listen to great music and to be lifted above the daily round and common task. It would enrich our life to read some bit of great literature and to see the world through the eyes of the writer. It would enrich our life to stand on some hilltop and view the setting sun and the mellow light which it casts on all the surrounding country. How much more it would enrich our life if, as we looked and listened, we poured out our thanksgivings to God from whom all these things come, to the God who made the painter, the musician, the author, to the God who for a moment let His glory shine upon the earth through the rays of the setting sun.

Thanksgiving is not only a duty, it is one of the greatest and the most ennobling privileges ever bestowed upon man. Well may we pray for grateful hearts, for the ability to appreciate the greatness of God's gifts, and for the ability to express rightly our sense of gratitude for those gifts.

## X

### WORSHIP

WORSHIP has already been defined as the expressing to God of our sense of His power, His beauty, and His love, or, in even more simple language, as telling and showing God how much we think of Him and how much we love Him. It has also been pointed out that worship is the highest part of prayer. It is the highest because it is the most unselfish. In confession, petition, and intercession, we seek something from God. In thanksgiving we express to God our gratitude for that which He has done for us, or for those in whom we are interested. But in worship, self is forgotten. We worship, not because we hope to receive something from God, nor because we have received something from Him, but simply because God is God. Worship springs out of one of the fundamental instincts of human nature. It is the welling-forth of our sense of God, His majesty, His holiness, His power, His beauty.

Dean Sperry, in his book, *Reality in Worship*, has a compelling chapter entitled "The Kingdom of Ends," in which he points out that there are certain things in

life which are ends and not means to an end—which lead to nothing beyond themselves. One of these things is friendship. True friendship results from the natural, instinctive drawing to each other of two persons. My friend is my friend not because he hopes to gain anything from the friendship or because he hopes to contribute anything to it, but simply because he desires it. He may, and if the friendship is real and true, he will, profit by it in many ways. He may and will bestow upon me benefits of various kinds. But the friendship itself is the result of an elemental movement of his being and of mine, each toward the other. Neither of us has any ulterior motive or purpose. True friendship is therefore one of the most satisfying things in the world. It is an end in itself.

So worship is an end in itself. We do not worship God, if we worship Him aright, in order that we may live a better life, as people so often think, for this would make worship a means to an end, and to use God for our own purposes is not a lawful thing to do even when our purposes are above reproach. Nor do we worship God because of any benefit that we can bestow upon Him, for this again would make worship a means to an end. We worship God because by the very constitution of our nature we are drawn toward Him, we become aware of His presence, His power, His love, and being aware of these, we express our sense of them as best we can. We tell God in words, we show God in attitudes and acts, how much we think of Him and how much we love Him. Here



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

there is nothing selfish, there is no trace of self-seeking, there is no desire to receive; there is a giving, an outpouring of self, in the most selfless possible way.

The difference between worship and other forms of prayer is the difference between receiving and giving, and our Lord has told us: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." In thanksgiving there is of course a giving, but it is in return for something received. In worship there is a giving but it is quite apart from any thought of receiving. To give oneself completely is to open oneself to receive completely, but to give in order to receive is to give with an ulterior motive, which limits one's power of receiving.

Worship enters or should enter every department of our life. The word *worship* is a short form of *worth-ship*, and means rendering to God that of which God is worthy. God is worthy of all that we can render to Him, so that worship should not be confined to church services, to our private prayers, nor to both together, but should express itself in and through our daily work also. We usually, however, understand worship to mean telling God or showing Him by attitudes of body and spirit in our public and private devotions how much we think of Him and how much we love Him.

Our private devotions should contain a large measure of worship. It is most unseemly, and it violates the spirit of prayer, to occupy all, or the greater part, of our prayer-time in seeking from God for ourselves or for others the things we need. We have

not moved far forward in the spiritual life unless at our devotions, morning and evening and at other times, we worship God.

When we stand in some art gallery before a beautiful picture, when at a concert we listen to uplifting music, when we are awed by a bit of natural scenery, or by the cloud effects of the rising or the setting sun, we are sometimes unable to put into words what we feel. Silence is our only refuge, and when we do speak it is not in quiet reasoned phrases, but in ejaculations: "How wonderful!" "How exquisite!" "What beautiful shading!" "What superb harmony!" and so on. Now all these expressions spring out of that fundamental instinct which is the basis of worship.

When, therefore, we read of the worship of the heavenly hosts, we are told of similar exclamations, such as, "Holy, Holy, Holy!" If we once catch the vision of God we shall find the same exclamation upon our lips. We too shall cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy!" or we may cry, "How wonderfully good, how majestic, how exquisitely beautiful Thou art, O God!" Do such expressions abound in our worship? We find them of course in the services of the Church, but most of us, it is to be feared, do not carry them into our own individual devotions.

But worship has not only to do with expression in words of our sense of awe in God's presence, but also with its expression in attitudes, and so we read of the heavenly hosts casting themselves down before God's throne, and we read of ancient prophets and other

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

devout men and women, falling on their faces before God after the oriental fashion. When we worship God we shall adopt similar attitudes of body and spirit. We shall not fall upon our faces, for this would not be natural to us; but we shall bow in deepest reverence. We shall from time to time lift up our hands as well as our hearts, and we shall long for other ways of giving expression to that yearning after God and that appreciation of God which occupies a large place in any spiritually developed person.

It will be well for us to begin by kneeling reverently and saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" or "We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord" or "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

Expressions such as these are hallowed by ages of use on the part of holy souls in widely scattered regions of the earth. We need not, however, confine ourselves to them; we may use any other words which naturally suggest themselves.

All this has to do with private devotion, but it must be remembered that the highest worship cannot be rendered by any single individual. It is a corporate thing and it involves the whole Church. Worship, as has been pointed out, is, in its deepest sense, selfless giving of self, but the giving of oneself selflessly is not, and cannot be, a purely individual thing. There is needed the coöperation of others to draw out self.

More than this, there is needed a definite act upon the part of God. Perhaps we may put the matter in this way: If we love purely and deeply we desire to give to him whom we love and to give generously. As love grows, the desire to give a truly worthy gift increases. As has been said, worship means giving to God that of which God is worthy, giving to Him all that we are and all that we have. But even this cannot satisfy our longing to give, because we ourselves are so unworthy. It is because we are so unworthy that God has given us His Son, and His Son has united us to Himself through the Incarnation and the Church, in order that we, in union with Him, may give ourselves and Him to God. Through our union with Him our unworthiness is gradually done away and the gift of ourselves is sanctified.

When Christ gave Himself upon the Cross, He gave Himself as the representative of human nature, and so the whole human race was given potentially in His giving of Himself. Christ's giving of Himself is a continuous thing. It did not begin on the Cross and it did not end there. He is now at the right hand of His Father giving Himself, and through our union with Him in the Church we are giving ourselves with Him.

It is in the Eucharist that this giving of self is focused. The Eucharist is not only a service in which we receive the Body and Blood of Christ; it is a service in which we, with Christ, offer ourselves as a



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

sacrifice—that is to say, as a sacred gift to the God and Father of us all.

In the Prayer of Consecration, after we have repeated the words in which our Lord instituted the Sacrament, after we have presented the memorial which our Lord has commanded us to make, and after we have prayed for the hallowing of the bread and wine by the coming of the Holy Spirit, we say: “and here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto Thee.”

In other words, we are linked to the memorial; that is, in the offering of Christ we give ourselves with Him, and this is our highest act of worship. As this act of worship is directly connected with the service of the Holy Communion it cannot be presented apart from the Church. To say this is not in any sense to belittle or to underestimate the worship which may be rendered to God outside the Church; it is rather to emphasize the fact that the Holy Communion is a part of the life of the Church, and that it has been ordained by Christ Himself not only as a means of union with Him but also as a means through which with Him we worship the Father.

To think of worship from this standpoint is to catch something of that sense of awe which is the basis of worship, to glimpse in some degree the sacredness and the magnitude of worship, to bring one in deep humility to his knees with the prayer that the offering which he presents may in some small measure be adequate

to its purpose and pleasing to Him who so graciously asks and deigns to receive it.

As we say in the *Te Deum*: "All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting. To Thee all Angels cry aloud; the Heavens, and all the Powers therein; To Thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of Thy glory. The glorious company of the Apostles praise Thee. The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise Thee. The noble army of Martyrs praise Thee. The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee."

With this great throng we are caught up to render to the God of heaven and earth, to the God of Apostles, Prophets, and Martyrs, to the God of the Church, our reverent adoration.

## XI

### MEDITATION

**I**N THE last five chapters we have been thinking of prayer from the standpoint of speaking to God. We come now to think of it from the standpoint of listening to God. However lofty the plane on which we express to God what is in our minds and hearts, we must give Him adequate opportunity to speak to us. We must cultivate the habit of listening.

This is not an easy habit to acquire. There are so many voices about us, so many sounds crowding in upon us, that we are in constant danger of being utterly confused. Either we hear no voice clearly and consistently or we settle down into the habit of hearing only the voices which are most persistent and blatant. It requires earnest and continuous effort to learn to recognize God's voice, to pick it out from the other voices which beat upon our ears. It can, however, be done, and until it is done, very little in the way of spiritual progress is possible. The more readily we can distinguish God's voice, the more habitually we listen for it and to it, and the more rapidly we shall grow.

There is a church situated in a rather noisy part of

a great city. In the summer when the windows are open noises come in from every quarter. At first it is with great difficulty that a newcomer follows what is said. The service is familiar, but a large part of it is missed and at times considerable portions of the sermon are lost. The experience is quite discouraging. The newcomer discovers, however, that after a time this difficulty disappears. Occasionally he misses a word, but on the whole he hears very well. What has happened is that his mind has formed the habit of ignoring the sounds that come from outside and of picking out the sounds to which he wishes to give attention. This is an apt illustration of the way in which the spirit can be trained to shut out the voices of the world and to listen to and hear the voice of God.

Listening to God's voice should become a habit so that we can hear it wherever we are and whenever God speaks to us. But in order to form the habit we must make a specific effort. This effort is usually made through what is known as meditation, a word which is used here with some hesitation because it is so widely misunderstood. Many people think of meditation as a practice which is so complex and formidable that it is quite beyond their reach. In essence it is quite simple. One of the main difficulties about it is the difficulty of persuading ourselves that this is true. Expecting it to be hard, we find it so. We choose a subject on which to meditate and discover that it is the one subject to which our mind refuses to give attention. All sorts of other things crowd in and our particular subject seems



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

to suggest nothing at all. The practice of meditation is certainly not without its difficulties, but it is not as difficult as people sometimes think. Let us approach it as simply as we can.

Perhaps we may begin with a definition or description by saying that meditation is prayer in which we, by a preparation of the mind and spirit, fit ourselves to receive, and do receive, messages from God. The mind and spirit work partly by way of opening all our faculties to receive God's word and partly by the actual receiving of that word and dwelling or feeding upon it. It is important to remember that meditation is neither purely nor primarily a mental exercise. The mind plays its part, but that part is to clear the way for God to speak directly to our spirits.

We should approach the effort to meditate with the realization that not only do we need to listen to God, but also that God yearns to speak to us. God is our Father; God loves us with all a father's love; He rejoices to hear us; He rejoices also to speak to us. There are innumerable things He would have us know, and certainly many things He would have us hear directly from His own lips. Since this is so we may expect meditation to enrich to a very great extent our mental, our emotional, and our spiritual life. We may expect that through it we shall grow in knowledge, in peace, and in power. It is certainly one of the greatest needs of our busy age, and it is especially needed in the Western world.

## MEDITATION

There are various types of meditation, but it will perhaps be sufficient here to suggest three.

1. The first, which is the simplest type or method, consists in *looking quietly backward over the events of the day which has passed*, or *quietly forward to the day which lies ahead*, finding what God means us to learn from the events of the day that has gone, or obtaining guidance from Him as to how the problems of the day which is to come are to be met.

If we are making our meditation in the morning, which is for most people the best time to make it, we kneel and seek God's guidance and blessing upon what we are about to do; we ask Him to open our ears to hear what He would say to us; we say the *Veni Creator*; we pray: "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth." Then we consider one by one the duties which lie before us so far as we know what they are. We ask God to fit us for each of these duties, to show us how we can best perform them, and to teach us through them what He would have us learn. We seek His guidance also with regard to the events and the duties we cannot foresee. We can do this in a very few minutes or we can spend a longer time upon it if a longer time is available. We close our meditation with a prayer for a trustful and obedient spirit, an expression of thanksgiving, and an act of worship.

If we are making our meditation in the evening we look back upon the day that has gone, upon the experiences that we have had. We confess what has been amiss; we ask God what He would have us learn from

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

our experiences; how He would have us turn them to our spiritual profit, how we may make them useful to others, and how through them we may advance His glory. As before, we give Him thanks, this time for the day itself and all its opportunities and, as before, we worship Him.

This method has the advantage of giving us at once a point of contact with our daily life. It is free from the sense of unreality which sometimes accompanies efforts to meditate in a more formal way. It has the disadvantage of being rather limited. It does not ordinarily lead us to a consideration of the great truths of the Faith and therefore does not broaden our minds and deepen our spirits to the same extent that some other methods of meditation do, but it is perhaps the only method that many people will be able to carry out successfully, and if it be followed faithfully and regularly, it will help forward our spiritual progress to a marked degree, will clarify our vision of God, will lift our lives to a higher plane, and will make us ever more and more useful in spreading God's kingdom.

2. The second method consists, as someone has put it, in *sitting down before a passage of Holy Scripture and hearing what it has to say to us*. As it is a part of God's Word we may be sure that God has in it some message for each one of us. We definitely try to find out what that message is.

First, we choose our passage; we prepare ourselves, as in the former method, by kneeling in silence, by

saying the Lord's Prayer and the Veni Creator, and by seeking in our own words God's guidance. We then read the passage over slowly and thoughtfully. We picture to ourselves the scene which it suggests. In some cases this will be very easily done; in other cases it will be more difficult. It will be especially difficult if the passage sets forth an abstract truth. In this case we may picture to ourselves the writer as he composed it, or as he uttered it if it is part of an address. Sometimes the picture may be omitted, but it is usually of real value in that it helps us to establish a more intimate contact with the passage itself. The use of the imagination in meditation is very important. It makes the meditation more concrete, and, kindling the emotions, it prepares the way for a more sympathetic and understanding consideration of the subject of the meditation.

After the picture, we dwell quietly upon the thoughts which the passage suggests. It is well to limit these thoughts to three. If the passage suggests more than three the additional thoughts may form the basis of another meditation.

Suppose we are meditating on our Lord's Nativity described in St. Luke 2:8-16. We shall, after our preparation, picture to ourselves the scene: the manger, the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph standing by, and the shepherds kneeling in adoration. Then we shall center our thoughts:

First, upon the Blessed Virgin. We shall consider what the birth of our Lord meant to her; not only



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

motherhood—so wonderful in itself—but motherhood which linked her intimately with all the preceding ages of her people's life, with all the experiences of the Jewish Church of which she was a member, with heaven itself from which her Child came.

Second, we shall consider St. Joseph, dwelling especially upon the wonder with which he looked upon this Child which was his, and yet not his, which had come into the world by the direct act of God Himself.

Finally, we shall look into the face of the Holy Child and strive to realize who He is. We shall think of the hopes centered in Him, of the union of heaven and earth, of God and man, brought to pass through Him.

We shall end with an acknowledgment of any wrong we have done Him, with a resolution to make Him the center of our life, with a prayer that we may be more faithful to Him, with a thanksgiving that He has revealed Himself as our Saviour, and with an act of reverent worship to Him as our Lord and God.

Instead of a passage of Scripture, we may use some truth of the Christian Faith, some article of the Creed. In this case we may picture ourselves, or ourselves with the congregation to which we belong, as expressing our faith in God through the use of the Creed. Or the particular article of the Creed which we have chosen may suggest a scene from our Lord's life, or some other scene with which we are familiar, and which in

one way or another brings before us this particular truth.

3. In the third method, we proceed according to the same general order as in the second. The only difference is that *the body of the meditation always follows a fixed form*. We ask ourselves three questions:

First, what has God done for us?

Second, what shall we do for God?

Third, what shall we do for our fellow men?

For example, if we are meditating upon the Crucifixion, we shall dwell upon the fact that God has given His Son upon the Cross for our redemption; upon the duty of surrendering ourselves completely to God, who has so revealed His love; upon the duty of forgiving those who have wronged us, and, if need be, of suffering for their sakes.

This method is more concrete than either of the previous ones. Its danger is that it may become stilted.

The Reverend Cyril Bickersteth, of the Community of the Resurrection, once summed up the parts of a meditation as follows: Prepare, Picture, Ponder, Promise, Pray. This summary reduces the whole matter to a very simple form and is easy to remember.

There are more formal methods of meditation, known by the names of the persons who suggested them, or of the schools from which they came. There are various books on meditation in which these methods are fully set forth. So far as their fundamental

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

elements are concerned, they do not differ very widely among themselves, nor are they essentially different from the methods which have been suggested. For our present purpose, and to avoid confusion, it has seemed better not to go into them here.

In order to avoid vagueness and to escape that wandering of mind to which we are all so prone, usually it will be found helpful to approach our meditation with pencil in hand, to jot down, or, if we are moved to do so, to write out the thoughts which come to us. This will also help to impress them upon our minds and will often deepen our sense of the reality of what we are doing.

The question of posture in meditation is one which needs careful thought. There are some who recommend that the whole meditation be made kneeling. This will depend largely upon the physical condition of the person meditating and to some extent upon the stage of progress he has reached. For people in general, the best rule seems to be to kneel for the preparation and the picture; to sit for the considerations of the body of the meditation; and to kneel again for the confession, the resolution, the prayer, the thanksgiving, and the act of worship.

Something will be said later about posture in general in connection with prayer. It is unnecessary to add anything further here, except the statement that of course one's attitude must not be indolent or slovenly. On the other hand it should be easy and natural. An uncomfortable position of the body may have its

advantage from the standpoint of self-discipline, but it can scarcely be other than a hindrance to meditation.

Various books containing outlines of meditation are available—some of them very excellent ones—and it is perhaps wise for the ordinary person to use such outlines from time to time. It does not seem wise to confine oneself to such outlines, however, for the danger of formalism is too great. The ideal is to make our own outline. Spiritual writers usually suggest that such an outline be made at least the night before, and this is wise but not necessary to reality or effectiveness in meditation. To make outlines for some days ahead is still better, but it will be in the highest degree unfortunate if one gets the idea that he cannot meditate profitably apart from such formal outlines. Some people find them rather hampering, and one may practice meditation faithfully and successfully with the freest kind of method.

Many have found great help in reading a passage of Holy Scripture meditatively—that is, in pausing to think quietly about whatever subjects the passage suggests, without any attempt to select definite points for consideration. This, of course, is to be distinguished from meditation in the formal sense; but it is meditation of a very valuable kind, and there are few things more needed today than quiet brooding over the text of Holy Scripture. The critical study of the Bible which has done so much to open our eyes to its meaning has in many instances led to an over-emphasis



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

upon a rather stark intellectual attitude toward it, and this is a matter for real regret. By all means let us get as wide and deep an intellectual grasp of Holy Scripture as possible. But this can never take the place of that spiritual grasp of it which comes from reading it to find sustenance for our spirits rather than for our minds.

One thing needs to be urged with all possible emphasis, and that is that everyone who seeks to develop his spiritual life should undertake the practice of meditation in some form, and should continue it, however difficult he may find it to be and however discouraging his experience in connection with it. If meditation seems to bring no spiritual illumination at all, the counsel of some wise person, priest, or layman, should be sought. We may be sure that if we persevere, seeking such help as we may need, our effort will be richly blessed.

It is well to have a simple rule about our meditations—a rule, for example, to give so much time each week, say ten minutes a day, or an hour or two hours a week. A ten-minute meditation will of course be very limited, but it may be very fruitful. If one can find a half hour a day, he will discover that the half hour given to meditation is of priceless value when estimated from the standpoint not of a particular day or week or month, but from the standpoint of a year or two years or longer. Meditation may be summed up in the statement of the Psalmist: "I will hearken what the Lord God will say."

## XII

### PRIVATE PRAYER AND PUBLIC PRAYER

THIS IS a book on private prayer, but it seems wise at this point to say a word about public prayer also; for while the two are essentially the same and rest upon the same broad basis, there are differences between them which need to be considered if our understanding of prayer is to be clear and our practice of it is to be thoroughly effective. Both public prayer and private prayer may be described as the breathing of the soul toward God, as the realization of the spiritual atmosphere by which we are surrounded, as speaking to God, and as listening to God. But the method of the one is not quite the same as that of the other. Our approach to God is somewhat different, and therefore there is a natural difference in method.

In public prayer we approach God primarily as King, while in private prayer we approach Him primarily as Father; not exclusively as King in the one case nor exclusively as Father in the other, but primarily. In public prayer we approach Him primarily as members of His Church, of His family, of the Body of Christ, while in private prayer we approach Him

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

primarily as His individual children. Here again too sharp a distinction must not be drawn. As members of His family we are His individual children; as His individual children we are members of His family. Yet it remains true that when we approach Him in public prayer the family idea is predominant, while the individual idea is predominant when we approach Him in private prayer.

In public prayer we must follow a prescribed form if our prayer is to be common. That is to say, if we are to enter into it in the fullest sense, we must know beforehand just how we are to proceed; otherwise there will be endless confusion, and our prayer will not be common prayer at all but individual prayer in a public assembly.

Even in those religious bodies whose members object to forms of prayer and who use what is called extempore prayer almost exclusively, there is form which is just as much form as when the prayers are composed beforehand and printed in a book. The only difference is that in the one case the minister sets the form at the time, while in the other it is set beforehand. When it is set beforehand people can enter into it most freely and wholeheartedly because they are acquainted with it and have time to consider and understand it.

In private prayer a set form is not necessary and, certainly in the case of those trained in prayer, would not seem to be desirable. We approach God as our Father, and our approach should be as free and as

natural as possible. We should open our hearts to Him just as we open our hearts to one another, and speak to Him without constraint of the things in which we are interested and also of the things in which He is interested.

As suggested in a former chapter, it is perhaps well for us all to learn by heart certain Collects or longer prayers which have stood the test of time, which we can make our own, and which we can use in our private prayers whenever we are moved to do so. But unless in our private prayers we are attaining to ever-increasing freedom of expression, unless we are learning to speak to God more and more spontaneously of our inmost thoughts, feelings, and aspirations, we are not making the progress that we should make, and our prayers are not what they should be. What we all need so greatly is a growing consciousness of God's presence, a growing ability to realize that presence at all times, in all places, and under all conditions, a growing facility in unburdening our hearts to God and in waiting quietly to hear what He has to say to us.

The fundamental difference between private and public prayer may perhaps be made more clear by an illustration. If a group of citizens were going to Washington to present a petition to the President of the United States, a petition which had to do with the welfare of the community which they represented, they would, before they went, together decide upon the form in which the petition was to be presented and



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

would choose one of their number to present the petition at the time appointed.

So in public worship the form in which our petitions, thanksgivings, and praises are presented has been drawn up beforehand by the whole Church, and this form is presented by the priest who represents the people. Of course he represents God also, but we are thinking of him now primarily as the representative of the people. The people approve the form which he presents and from time to time by responses and amens join in that form and express their approval of and agreement with it.

If a single individual were going to Washington to call on the President as a personal friend of his, he would talk to him personally as one talks to another in the freest and most spontaneous manner possible. If when he actually came into the presence of the President he drew from his pocket a typewritten or a printed paper expressing what he had planned to say and began to read it, the President would have ground for doubting his sanity. It is not an overstatement of the case to say that too great dependence upon books of devotion or upon memorized forms in our private prayers indicates that something is radically wrong.

One can only view with disquietude what seems to be a growing tendency to set forth forms of prayer to be used in preparation for the Holy Communion and in private devotion generally, and to insist on people's using them. They may be excellent in themselves but it is not probable that they will help people

to grow in freedom of approach to God. It may perhaps be said that forms of prayer are better than nothing, and this will scarcely be questioned. It may also be maintained that for people in general this way is the only feasible one. Whether or not this be true one is not prepared to say, but we should certainly not be content with following the line of least resistance. To learn freedom in prayer is a difficult thing. To teach other people freedom in prayer is a more difficult thing. But this is no reason why we should give up the one or the other; and neither would be quite so difficult if we had not for so long depended overmuch upon forms in our private prayers.

Anyone who has earnestly tried to pray realizes how frequently his mind will wander and how vague his prayers tend to become, but this again may be because of an over-emphasis upon form. The difficulty is that we think more about the act of praying and about the particular way in which we word our prayers than about pouring out to God what is in our minds and hearts.

A general method in prayer has been suggested in a former chapter. Some such method is of great importance, and if we keep this general method in mind we need not be troubled overmuch about a more detailed form.

We must not let our prayers become too limited, but so long as we are careful to see that they contain praise, thanksgiving, intercession, petition, confession, meditation, and brief periods of silence, we shall not

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

go far wrong if we leave ourselves quite free to express ourselves in the way we are moved to do at the time.

There will be times when the best that we can do is to lift up our hearts to God and present ourselves to Him, resting quietly in His presence; when no words will come; when mind and heart and spirit are weary. But this is true in our converse with our fellow men, and we are not unduly troubled by it; nor need we be unduly troubled by it in our converse with God.

Liturgical forms in public prayer should go side by side with freedom in private prayer, and the one should balance the other; together they will greatly enrich our prayer life. He who is steeped in the devotional language of the ages will be, or at any rate should be, the better able to express naturally, simply, freely, his own devotion when he approaches God, as God's child.

In other words, public prayer and private prayer are but two parts of one whole. Both are important, both indeed are necessary, if we are to take full advantage of the privilege of prayer which God has given us.

The two are combined in the service of the Holy Communion. In that service we pray both as members of Christ's Body, the Church, and as individual children of God. The Holy Communion is not a purely private service, nor is it a purely public or corporate service. It is both public and private, both individual and corporate. For its fulness it requires more than one individual, even if that individual be a priest. In it a sec-

tion of the Church approaches God in prayer; but this section is made up of individuals. When we kneel at the Altar rail we kneel there as individuals, and the Body and Blood of Christ is administered to each one of us separately. We carry with us our individual thoughts and aspirations, our individual confessions, petitions, and intercessions.

We are taught in most devotional books, and quite rightly, the importance of having a special intention each time we go to this great service. To have a special intention means to have foremost in our thoughts some specific thing around which on that particular day our minds are centered; some thanksgiving, some petition, some confession of sin, some purpose which we hope to accomplish.

It is important that this special intention be kept in its proper place. The danger is that it may lead us to forget the corporate nature of the service in which we are engaged, and to make the service too much an individual and perhaps a selfish thing. It is a good rule to present this special intention to God when we kneel for our preparation before the service begins, and, when it begins, to give ourselves wholly to it, concentrating our thoughts upon each part of it as it is rendered.

Thus shall we maintain the balance between public and private prayer. Thus shall we realize our individual relationship to God, our relationship to Him through His Church, and our relationship to the Church and all its members.



### XIII

#### SOME FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

FOR THE sake of completeness something should be said about certain fundamental principles which have not been discussed so far, which have been spoken of only incidentally, or which seem to need additional emphasis. The failure to grasp clearly these principles is responsible for much misunderstanding in regard to prayer and in large measure for the lack of enthusiasm with which many Christian people approach it. The principles are in themselves very simple, but like so many other simple things they are fundamental. It will not be necessary to deal with them at length, but they do need to be clearly stated and some comment upon them will be necessary. They may all be included within this one chapter.

1. *Only God can teach us to pray.* This is the statement of a well-known French devotional writer. Though self-evident it is frequently forgotten, and when it is forgotten, prayer never rises above a rather low plane. The instinct to pray is implanted within us by God and is an essential part of the endowment with which we come into this world. With the instinct

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

to pray goes a certain latent capacity for prayer. This capacity is developed as other capacities are, by exercise and training.

There is a technique of prayer, and this we may learn from books and from human teachers. But technique by itself is a dead thing. If it is to be of any use at all, the Spirit of God must be breathed into it, and only God can impart His spirit. Therefore the first use we make of our capacity to pray should be to ask God to teach us the art of prayer. Only by praying for the power to pray, only by seeking from God the guidance of His Spirit in prayer, can we enter into the fulness of the prayer life.

It was after the Apostles had companied with our Lord for a considerable time that they came to Him with the request: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." The answer to that request we know as the Lord's Prayer, a prayer which we should use constantly and which should be the pattern of all our other prayers, a prayer which, if used earnestly, intelligently, regularly, and with faith, will open to us the doors of heaven and take us to the very heart of God Himself.

2. *God is our Father and rejoices in our prayer.* Very many earnest Christian people approach prayer with a certain timidity. Some even approach it with a sense of fear. Few things can be more pathetic than this, and few things can retard our prayer life so effectively. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "Seeing . . . that we have a great high priest,

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, . . . let us . . . come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Boldly—that is, not rashly but freely, without fear, as a son approaches his father.

God is our Father, and because He is He rejoices in every approach we make to Him, He rejoices to have us pour out to Him all that is in our minds and hearts, to have us tell Him of our needs, our sins, our aspirations, our gratitude, our sense of His power, and wisdom, and love. "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

3. *The human soul is of infinitely greater interest to God than all the laws of nature.* We are not as much disturbed as we once were by the fear that prayer may interfere with the laws of nature, partly because we have come to understand more clearly that the laws of nature are God's laws, and that God can use them as He will for His own purposes, and partly because we have come to see that if God is tied by the laws which He has made, so that He cannot alter them whenever it is His will to do so, He is not God, or at any rate He is not a God with whom it is worth our while to be deeply concerned.

We have in recent years gained a clearer sense of proportion, a more accurate appreciation of essential values. We see that the human soul, impotent as it so often seems to be, is of much higher rank than any material thing; that it is of much more interest to God

than all the laws of nature put together; and that the laws of nature are of value only insofar as they serve God's purpose for men.

4. *God always answers prayer.* We have already seen in the course of this book that petition is only one of the elements of prayer, and not the most important one. It is, however, important, and a consideration of it always brings up the question of answers to prayer. Many people who have made a real effort to pray but who have not attained the fulfilment of the desires which they have expressed in their prayer, have asked in their discouragement: "Why does not God answer my prayer?"

It may be said without hesitation that God always answers any earnest prayer which is offered to Him. He does not always answer it as we desire. If He did, we could scarcely think of Him as a wise or a kind God; for to answer many of the petitions we make to Him would be foolish and cruel in the extreme. As we grow in the knowledge of prayer we come to realize this more and more clearly. No wise and kind parent ever grants all the petitions of his child in the way that the child wishes. He considers the child's desire and responds to it so far as his love and his wisdom dictate—that is, so far as he can do so in justice to the child. Knowing more of life than the child knows, he is in a much better position to decide what is for the child's good.

So it is with God. God always answers prayer, if it be earnest and honest. But sometimes He answers



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

"No," and sometimes He answers "Wait." With His complete knowledge of life He understands what is best for each individual, and this understanding determines the answer to each individual's prayer. To accept God's "No," and to accept it lovingly, is often to have our eyes opened to a clearer vision of Him and of life; to accept His "Wait" is to learn patience and humility, both of them precious virtues.

5. *We pray that we may help to accomplish God's will, not that we may have our own will.* Although it has already been dealt with more or less fully, it seems worthwhile to restate this principle here, for many find difficulty in learning it, and failure to learn it causes much disappointment and often makes life a drab affair. God, of His goodness, permits us to share in the carrying out of His will for ourselves and for the world, and prayer is one of the means by which we do it. He who loves another surrenders his will to that other as far as he can do so wisely and kindly. He who loves God surrenders his will completely to God at every moment, for he knows that God's will is always right. There can never be any question as to the wisdom or the love which lies behind it.

6. *To use the phrase "Through Jesus Christ our Lord" is equivalent to asking God to grant our prayer only insofar as it accords with His will.* We go to God freely; we tell Him freely of our desires; and we end our prayer with some such phrase as "Through Jesus Christ our Lord," thereby submitting our will to His will. We say in effect: "This is what I desire; it is

what seems to me wise and right so far as I can see; but what I really wish is what is wise and right from the standpoint of Thy complete knowledge and love."

7. *To pray "Thy will be done" is not an act of submission but one of glad coöperation with God.* It is active, not passive. To pray "Thy will be done," as we are taught to do by our Lord, is to ally ourselves completely with God, to put ourselves and all that we have on God's side, to submit ourselves wholly to Him. It is not, as so many people seem to think, a submitting of ourselves to God because that is the only thing left for us under the conditions.

There is a rather general idea, though it is not often put into so many words, that we go to God and plead with all the earnestness at our command for the thing which we desire and that in ending with the words, "Thy will be done," we are saying in effect that what we really desire is the fulfilment of our will, but if we cannot have this we will accept the only thing which is left, which is the fulfilment of God's will. To approach God in such a spirit is to run counter to the fundamental principle upon which prayer rests. To accept God's will reluctantly is the act of a slave, not of a son. The son desires and seeks with all his strength the fulfilment of his father's will, whatever be the cost to himself.

The fulfilment of God's will may mean the giving up of our most cherished wish. It may mean the discrediting of us in the eyes of the world. It may mean the taking from this life of our dearest friend. It may

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

mean disappointments of various kinds. But it means ultimately our highest good.

To pray "Thy will be done" requires courage of a high order, faith which is deeply rooted, and love which has lost every trace of selfishness.

## XIV

### PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

THE AIM of this book has been to set forth the fundamental bases upon which prayer rests, and the essential elements in the practice of the prayer life. To these may be added certain definite suggestions. Some of them have already been made, but it will not be amiss if these are repeated in more concrete form.

Prayer often fails because those who pray do not understand its underlying principles. It often fails also because those who pray forget or ignore or are careless about certain practical elements. These elements taken one by one may seem of slight moment, but taken together they are of considerable importance.

Life is made up of things great and small. Someone has said that it is the little things which count. They do not of course count as much as the great things, but their significance is far larger than we are inclined to think and not infrequently the neglected little things interfere quite materially with the success of great things.

A public speaker may be ever so able intellectually



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

and spiritually, may have a message which is invaluable, but he may fail to convey his message to his hearers because of some deficiency in his method of constructing his addresses or in his manner of delivering them. It is not always the ablest people in the world who are the most successful. Often a person of slight ability achieves astonishing results because he knows how to apply the little ability that he has.

So it is with prayer. One may understand ever so clearly the principles upon which it rests, may be able to write learnedly and convincingly about it, and yet may fail miserably in his own prayer life because he neglects certain very practical considerations. The suggestions about to be made are of the simplest nature, but the writer's experience, extending now over many years, in talking with people about prayer and in trying to teach them with regard to it, has convinced him that they are worth making.

1. *Have a definite time and place for prayer.* Our approach to God is not limited by time or space. We may go to God when we will and wherever we may be. He is with His children at all times and in all places. The fixing of a time and place is not necessary for Him, but it is necessary for us, or at any rate for most of us. People do not make much progress unless they are regular in their prayers, unless they have fixed times for prayer. These times cannot always be rigidly adhered to. Any rule that one makes in such matters will often be broken, and all such rules are subject to alteration as our circumstances and our needs

## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

change. But the person who thinks that the prayer life, or the spiritual life in general, should be entirely free and unhampered by rules of any kind and who therefore prays when he feels like it and puts off his prayer until he feels like praying, is very apt to end by giving up prayer altogether.

Certainly every Christian should pray in the morning before he takes up the day's work or as soon thereafter as possible, and every evening before he retires. Other times of prayer will vary with the conditions under which the individual lives, but whatever these times are they should be carefully observed.

It is not quite as important to have a fixed place for prayer, but a fixed place will be of great value. If one has a house, a small room may be set apart as an oratory; a room to which he may go with the certainty that ordinarily he will not be disturbed while there; a room which is quiet; a room which is so arranged that it suggests God.

If one has to live in a single room or in one or two rooms, as so many people do today, he may at least set apart a corner in a room and make that corner his prayer place. He may arrange the corner according to his own religious tastes. A cross, a crucifix, a sacred picture, will do much to create an atmosphere of prayer.

It will be found that if we pray regularly in a given place, that place will in due time suggest prayer whenever we go to it. This is not theory. There are

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

throng of people who out of their practical experience are ready to testify that it is actual fact.

2. *In the morning pray when you are ready to leave your room. By that time you will be awake.* Some people pray as soon as they get out of bed, but few of us are alert until we have had our bath and are dressed. Many of us are not alert then, but we are more so than at any previous time in the morning. More than this, while prayer is a simple and intimate exercise, it is also a dignified one and should always be marked by reverence. Ordinarily it would seem to be more reverent to approach God when we are fully dressed—that is, of course, for our regular prayers. To pray before we rise is an excellent thing and should not be underestimated for a moment. None the less, for our regular morning prayers experience shows that it is better to offer them when we are ready for the day.

3. *In the evening pray before making your preparation to retire.* The same principle applies here. We may be very tired, and often are at the end of the day, but we shall be more wide awake ordinarily before we have undressed than afterwards. When we undress we quite naturally relax, and if we are tired, we may fall asleep. Here again it seems more dignified and more reverent to make our prayers the end of our working day and the prelude to our night than it is to make our preparation for bed the prelude to our prayers.

4. *Do not pray by your bedside. Beds suggest sleep.*



## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

If we have a fixed place for our prayers, of course this suggestion will be unnecessary; but there are few people who have not at some time in their lives needed it. Most of us must confess with chagrin that we have more than once knelt by our bedside to pray and fallen fast asleep. We have not prayed, and we have slept in an uncomfortable position, and so we have not had all the rest that sleep should bring. In other words we have to a large extent failed along both lines.

5. *Kneel down—that is, on your knees.* It seems quite unnecessary to say this. But again experience teaches that it is far from unnecessary. In most of our churches, if not all of them, some will be found who systematically follow the practice of “kneeling on their foreheads”—that is, of sitting in their pews and leaning forward—a most undignified and unhealthy position, not a reverent one, and certainly not one that is conducive to the deepest devotion. In church and at home there will be found people who take all sorts of uncomfortable and unreligious attitudes and who as a result gradually grow into a slovenly idea of God. No doubt their idea of God was slovenly in the beginning, but such a habit makes it more so.

6. *Kneel up—that is, erect.* One may of course bend his body forward as an act of reverence, but most people cannot retain a position of this kind for any length of time, partly because it is an unaccustomed position and partly because it is lacking in freedom. The normal position for one who is kneeling is to kneel erect. Such a position does not produce undue



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

fatigue. If one knows how to kneel he can kneel for a long time and be comfortable, just as one can stand for a long time and be comfortable if he knows how to stand. The secret is to kneel squarely upon the knees, to keep the body always in a normal position—that is, in such a position that no part of it is distorted or unnaturally placed.

7. *Do not be hurried in your prayer. No more important work awaits you.* To remember this is of very great importance. Hurry seldom, if ever, helps in anything. We often have to do much in a short time, but the secret of doing so successfully is to act calmly, quietly, deliberately. Hurry almost always means waste of time, and one is never at his best when he hurries. This is true of work. It is true also of prayer. We are apt to hurry in prayer because we look upon prayer as a duty, as in some sense necessary but as of slight importance in comparison with our daily work or, it may be, with our pleasure. This is an utterly mistaken point of view. Nothing can be more important than prayer if it is earnest, intelligent, and offered in faith.

More than this, if our prayer is to help our work, it can only do so if it has a steadying effect upon us, as it cannot have if we hurry through it. Hurry in anything usually unfits us for the next thing we do. Therefore, take time to pray. If you have but five minutes, or even but three, make the most of those minutes, for they are precious beyond one's power to express. In other words, put your whole self into them,

and be certain that they are minutes of calm, deliberate converse with God.

8. *Let prayer be always natural. There need be no constraint in your approach to God.* This brings us back to what was said about our private prayers and especially about the use of books of devotion. If we are to approach God naturally, as our Father, we may indeed use forms of prayer, but they must have become a real part of us and express what is in our minds and our hearts. Normally, however, we shall pray with the freedom of sons; we shall pour out our hearts, sometimes very haltingly, sometimes easily and fluently, but always with that deep confidence which is natural to sons.

9. *Ignore wandering thoughts.* Earnest people are often greatly troubled by wandering thoughts in prayer, so much so that they constantly labor under a sense of guilt, and their prayer life becomes a burden rather than a joy. Wandering thoughts are indeed distressing, but to take them too seriously is only to complicate the problem. The wise thing is to ignore them as completely as we possibly can. They are somewhat like spoiled children who are quite happy so long as they can win and hold our attention, who will go on making themselves a nuisance so long as we show the slightest interest in them, but who very quickly grow weary and leave us alone if we ignore them. Pay attention to wandering thoughts and they will continue to wander, and wander the more as we grow weary

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

struggling with them. Leave them alone and they will usually wear themselves out.

There will be occasions when we are so weary mentally that our minds cannot be brought under control, not even sufficiently to ignore the thoughts which distract them. In this case it is better just to look up into God's face, acknowledge our weariness, cast ourselves upon His loving care, and for the time being give up the effort to pray. But, in general, wandering thoughts are best dealt with as has been suggested.

10. *When wakeful at night, regard your wakefulness as an opportunity for prayer.* Even the soundest sleepers occasionally find themselves wakeful at night, and there are many whose sleeplessness is more or less chronic. It is possible to rest even though one does not sleep, but most people who suffer from sleeplessness are disturbed, in spite of all that they can do, by the thought that they will be unfitted for the work of the following day. What a comfort and a strength it would be to them if instead of spending their wakeful hours in worry they would fill them with prayer.

As has already been pointed out, the need for intercession is well-nigh limitless, as are the occasions for thanksgiving; and our opportunities for both, as well as for confession, petition, worship, and meditation, are all too few. It is important that we have sufficient sleep, but when we are unable to sleep, prayer will accomplish two things. It will quiet us and will often lead to sleep, sleep of the most restful and in-

## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

vigorating kind. It will also, like prayer at other times, bring us into closer touch with God and with our fellow men. More than this, it will enrich our own prayer life and help forward our spiritual development.



## XV

### THE LORD'S PRAYER

SEVERAL times in this book there has been occasion to refer to the prayer which our Lord taught His disciples. But without some further treatment of it, the book would not be complete. Because the prayer came from our Lord Himself and because it is what it is, it is precious to all Christians, and presumably forms the background of every study of prayer from the Christian standpoint.

It occurs twice in the Gospels in slightly different forms. We find it in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew and in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. In the former it is prefaced by the words, "After this manner therefore pray ye," and in the latter by the words, "When ye pray, say." Christians, in obedience to these commands, use the prayer frequently, and also pattern after it their other prayers. In other words, it is a prayer to be used as it is, and it is at the same time the pattern prayer.

When we use it as it is, we need to be on our guard against the danger of vain repetition—that is, the

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

danger of using it mechanically, of repeating its words without entering whole-heartedly into them, of praying with our lips but not with our hearts. It will help us if every time we say the prayer we make a definite effort to recall that it came directly from our Lord's own lips, and that it has His authority behind it, that whether or not we understand its full significance, our real desire is that on our lips it shall mean what it meant as it came from Him. Every time we say it we are in some sense His mouthpiece. Therefore we should say it thoughtfully, reverently, lovingly, naturally, freely. It is *the Lord's Prayer*, as we are accustomed to call it. It is also *the disciple's prayer*. It is the prayer in which, in a very special sense, Master and disciple are one.

When we view it as the pattern prayer we may make three great statements with regard to it, statements which sum up its essential nature and which may be used as headings for our consideration of it.

1. *It is a filial prayer.* It is addressed to the Father, to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose character Christ revealed in His life here upon earth and in His death upon the Cross; the Father who is also our Father; to Him from whom our life proceeds, and to whom it is directed; to Him who loves us with an everlasting love, who provides for all our needs, who understands us, who sympathizes with us, and who longs for our understanding and sympathy in return. He is the Father in whom we live and move and have

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

our being. We approach Him as His sons, with penitence, with gratitude, with love.

He is the Father who is in heaven. This on the surface seems to separate Him from us because our idea of heaven is all too often that of a place which is far off. In reality heaven is all about us, and when we say that God our Father is in heaven, we are not thinking of space at all but rather of character. He is our Heavenly Father; the Father who breathes the atmosphere of heaven, who lives on the heavenly plane, who is not in any way soiled or corrupted by the sins of earth; who is, as St. John has put it, Light, and in whom is no darkness at all; who is on earth as well as in heaven, and who views earth always from the heavenly standpoint.

2. *It is a social prayer—that is, a prayer which is based upon our oneness in Christ Jesus.* It is a prayer for all God's children. As has already been said in an earlier chapter, its pronouns, except those which refer to God, are all plural. It is not "*my Father*," but "*our Father*"; not "*give me this day my daily bread*," but "*give us this day our daily bread*"; not "*forgive me my trespasses*," but "*forgive us our trespasses*"; not "*lead me not into temptation*," but "*lead us not into temptation*"; not "*deliver me from evil*," but "*deliver us from evil*."

It is, in other words, a Church prayer, a prayer which contemplates our membership in the family of God, in the Body of Christ. What in it we ask for ourselves we ask also for others. It is this great funda-

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

mental truth which underlies all teaching about Christian social reform. When we use the Lord's Prayer sincerely, we become, by that very fact, social reformers in the deepest and best sense of that term. That is to say, we become seekers after justice for all, true lovers of our fellow men, true sons of our common Father.

3. *It is an individual prayer.* The Lord's Prayer is filial and social, but it is also individual. Not individual in the sense in which that word is commonly used, but individual in the Christian sense of the term. In this sense of the term, individual does not mean that one is separated from his brethren, but rather that he is a unit in the great Christian fellowship, that apart from that fellowship he cannot be all that an individual is meant to be, that it is only in and through that fellowship that his individuality is developed along the right lines.

Christianity is a religion of love. Christian prayer is based upon love. No one can be a Christian in the fullest sense and no one can pray as a Christian should, without love. Love is that power which binds individuals together and thus brings out their true individuality.

He who seeks to develop his individuality by separating himself from his fellow men misunderstands the aim and end of human life. And if he acts consistently he becomes increasingly sub-human. He runs counter not only to his own nature but to the nature of the whole of God's creation. Even the animal and the



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

vegetable kingdoms are what they are because each animal and each vegetable is a part of a whole. The Lord's Prayer is based upon the solidarity of the human race, and more especially upon the solidarity of the Christian fellowship.

It has already been pointed out, but it should perhaps be repeated, that the order of the petitions in the prayer is significant. In it we seek first God's glory. We pray "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done" before we ask anything for ourselves. In other words, our fundamental aim in prayer is the fulfilment of God's will, the extension of His Kingdom, the true appreciation of and reverence for His Name.

Only after this do we ask for food, for forgiveness, for protection from evil. The food which we seek is both material and spiritual. We recognize that in seeking forgiveness we must pray in a forgiving spirit. To ask that God forgive us when we have not first forgiven our fellow men is to make the granting of our prayer impossible; only a forgiving spirit is capable of receiving forgiveness.

We shrink from temptation, from trial of any kind, and ask that we may not be subjected to it, but that whenever it comes we may be carried safely through it, that we may always be kept from evil.

The petition "Lead us not into temptation" is a puzzle to many people. The idea that God might lead us into temptation is repellent to them and they recall the statement of St. James that "God cannot be tempted

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

with evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

We have to remember that the word *tempt* is used in two quite different senses. It means to entice to evil, as in the passage just quoted, but it also means to try or test. In the book of Genesis we are told that "God did tempt Abraham" when He called upon Him to sacrifice his son Isaac. The meaning, of course, is that God put him to the test.

We cannot escape being tested in some sense, and it is testing which affords us the opportunity of resisting evil, and so of building up spiritual strength. Yet unless we are over-confident we shrink from being tested, and in the Lord's Prayer we ask that we may not be. The idea is that we may be saved from trial or testing insofar as this is good for us. If, however, in God's wisdom we are led into it, as to some degree we are bound to be, we ask that we may be saved from giving way under it, that we may be delivered from evil, or, as it perhaps should be translated, "from the evil one."

The end of the prayer as it is found in St. Matthew's Gospel, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory," is probably not a part of the prayer in its original form, but is generally thought to have been a part of a Christian hymn added to the prayer in the very early days and seems to be based upon First Chronicles 29:11. It seems a fitting conclusion, recognizing as it does that the Kingdom, for

## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

the coming of which we have prayed, is God's Kingdom, that the power by which it comes is God's power, and that the glory which characterizes it is God's glory.

To use the Lord's Prayer is at once a great privilege and a great responsibility. To use it mechanically, thoughtlessly, hurriedly, would seem to be in the nature of a sacrilege; to use it thoughtfully, reverently, lovingly, wholeheartedly, is to carry out our Lord's will and to link ourselves with Him in the closest possible way.

Let us end as we began. The world has many needs, but its greatest need is prayer, and the grace of God which comes through prayer. May God who has poured out His grace for us through His Son Jesus Christ teach us so to pray that His grace may be ours in fullest measure.

## THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

SOME YEARS ago I published a little folder entitled "Thoughts on Prayer" which sums up briefly some of the principles set forth in this book. As the folder was found to be of help it has seemed worthwhile to reprint it here.

### *What Prayer Is*

1. Prayer is the *breathing* of the soul toward God.
2. Prayer is the *changing* of our atmosphere or the *realizing* that we are surrounded by God and the Holy Angels.
3. Prayer is *speaking* to God.
4. Prayer is *listening* to or resting in God.  
In prayer the will of man *puts into operation* the will of God.

The *object* of prayer is to help God carry out His plan for the universe.

### *An Order of Prayer for the Day*

1. Silence, in order to realize God's presence.
2. Confession of sin.
3. Petition, *i.e.*, request for ourselves and our needs.
4. Intercession, *i.e.*, request for others and their needs.
5. Thanksgiving to God because of what He has done for us.
6. Worship of God because of what He is.
7. Silence, in order to hear God's voice and to rest in Him.



## OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

### *An Order of Prayer for the Week*

*Monday*—Relatives and friends.

*Tuesday*—City, state, and nation.

*Wednesday*—The Church.

*Thursday*—Missions.

*Friday*—The world.

*Saturday*—The departed.

*Sunday*—Thanksgiving.

### *Principles to be Remembered*

1. Only God can teach us to pray.
2. God is our Father, and rejoices in our prayer.
3. The human soul is of infinitely greater interest to God than all the laws of nature.
4. God always answers prayer, but sometimes He answers "No," sometimes "Wait."
5. We pray that we may help to accomplish God's will, not that we may have our own.
6. To use the phrase "Through Jesus Christ our Lord" is equivalent to asking God to grant our prayer only insofar as it accords with His will for us and for the world.
7. To pray "Thy will be done" is not an act of submission, but of glad coöperation with God; it is active, not passive.

### *Practical Suggestions*

1. Have a definite time and place for prayer.
2. Do not pray by your bedside. Beds suggest sleep.
3. In the morning pray when you are ready to leave your room. By that time you will be wide awake.
4. In the evening pray before making your preparation to retire.
5. Kneel down—that is, on your knees.

## THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

6. Kneel up—that is, erect.
7. Do not be hurried in your prayer. No more important work awaits you.
8. Let your prayer be always natural. There need be no constraint in your approach to God.
9. A sacred picture, a cross, a crucifix, will help to fix your thoughts.

WOMAN'S AUXILIARY

SAN DIEGO CONVOCATION